Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic

Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic

From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance

Ruth B. Bottigheimer

Palgrave Historical Studies in Witchcraft and Magic

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From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance

Ruth B. Bottigheimer
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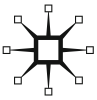

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of good friends who accompanied and often guided me
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Karl Bottigheimer

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Karl Bottigheimer is always my first reader. Nearly 60 years of conversation with him have enriched my work and my life.

1
Tales, Magic, and Fairy Tales

This book focuses on the narrative aspects of magic in magic tales from ancient Egypt to the Renaissance and the early modern period in Europe. In these tales magic often operates from a parallel world and affirms existing earthly and supernatural hierarchies. In the process, both magic and supernatural beings frequently pose dangers to ordinary mortals in the tales. An important component of this study is its interest in what characters in magic tales perceive to be magic and what they accept as normal manifestations, even when they appear uncanny to modern eyes. The variations in magic tale characters' perception and experience of magic suggests a new and different prehistory for fairy tales.

In magic tales, gods in the ancient world and medieval fairy creatures inhabit a richly peopled world of their own, from which they can and do emerge to affect the lives of ordinary mortals. In sixteenth-century Venice a new sort of magic tale appeared. For the first time there began to exist a sustained tradition of magic tales in which supernaturals and fairy figures without either backstories or residence in a parallel world enter narratives in order to benefit human beings. This is fairy tale magic, and it emerges within a set of early modern problematics generated by profound social, economic, and religious shifts.

A second change marks magic tales in the millennia between ancient Egypt and the Italian Renaissance. Over the centuries the prominence of the parallel world inhabited by divinities and supernatural forces gives way to the earthly world, as human protagonists replace divinities and supernatural forces at the center of narrative focus.

A third tendency in magic tales over this long period involves the effect of magic itself on magic tale characters. In the ancient and medieval worlds, magic often posed a maleficent threat to human beings,

with happy endings reserved for other-worldly bliss in a heavenly afterlife. In Renaissance magic tales, magic becomes a narrative motor that can bring about a heaven on earth happy ending for its heroes and heroines, a narrative closure that marks the fairy tale genre.

The deep and rich vein of magic in its many incarnations has been examined, assessed, re-examined, and re-assessed. In the preceding paragraphs I have offered observations; my efforts to account for these observations lie interspersed within the following chapters. In this opening chapter I will simply point out that the nature of magic in its relationship to tale protagonists in magical tales has been little regarded, as have the changes over time in the nature of magic, possibly because fairy tale magic – believed to have existed unchanged over millennia – has seemed to require little examination. In the following chapters I examine the shifting balance between magic's maleficent and beneficent effects on mortals in the tales, the physical composition of magic, the earthly or other-worldly locus of supernaturals, and the allocation of agency among supernaturals and human beings.

What emerges is a generally unidirectional drift in the control of magic over time. In magic tales from the ancient world, divinities largely monopolized magic; in tales of the Jewish and Muslim Middle Ages, the absolute power over the universe that characterizes monotheism correlates with portrayals of a single divinity as the ultimate manipulator of magic, while in medieval Christian magic tales, magic exists within hierarchical orderings of divine agents that differ from place to place and that also change over time.

Jewish and medieval Muslim magic tales share many narrative structures, and both traditions are shaped by their monotheistically driven plots. In contrast, structural and narrative similarities link the polytheistic magic in ancient Greek and Roman magic tales with, for instance, contests between the Virgin Mary and the devil in medieval Christian magic as well as with miracle tales and early modern fairyland fictions.

Renaissance fairy tales deploy magic differently from their magic tale predecessors. Their fairy tale magic exists solely within the human universe and its results nearly always benefit the tales' human heroes and heroines. Furthermore, in fairy tales, only the manifestly wicked suffer ill effects from magic (in contrast to fairyland fictions, which will be discussed below). Considered within a large historical continuum, fairy tale magic resembles a response to fundamental changes in the way(s) human beings understand their position both within familiar secular society and a transcendent religious universe.

The statements above run counter to contemporary assumptions about much of the world of narrative magic, but hundreds of tales bear witness to the profound shifts alluded to here. The most significant shift moves ancient and medieval magic from its (principal) service to divinities to the service of human beings. Of course, there are exceptions to this overall direction of development. How could there *not* be exceptions, when so many voices have told so many stories from so many differing individual perspectives? I do not argue narrowly, from single tales, but from overall tendencies, which emerge from dozens of tales in each of the cultural traditions explored in Chapters 2 to 8.

Positioning fairy tales within historical and intellectual movements may seem grandiose for so humble a genre, but it is defensible and it is foundational for the following chapters. Equally present is a thesis put forward in *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and Fairy Tale Tradition* in 2002 about magically mediated weddings that produce fairy tales' happy endings. Here and there one encounters such plots before the Renaissance, but the story-line didn't take hold in medieval Christian Europe. First of all, the centrality of magic that characterizes fairy tales contradicted the anti-magic literary requirements for the European novella tradition in the medieval and early modern period, and second, magic as a functional narrative element seems to have run counter to popular expectations, as exemplified in *Liom/nbruno* in Chapter 6. Furthermore, the fewness of magically mediated weddings that produce happy endings in Jewish and Muslim medieval narrative traditions shows that it was equally atypical there.

Historical magic practice and confrontations between magic practice and overarching intellectual developments such as Renaissance humanism, the scientific revolution, and Enlightenment rationalism have been well studied, and form only a small part of this book's purview. Here the emphasis is on magic as it functions narratively in magic tales as a whole and in fairy tales in particular. My teaching of Greek and Roman mythology proved invaluable for thinking about mythic metamorphoses in ancient storytelling, while a decades-long fascination with medieval European brief narratives provided a foundation for exploring medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tales of magic and miracles.[1]

---

[1] I would like to draw readers' attention to Patricia Eichel-Lojkine's *Contes en Réseaux. L'émergence du conte sur la scène littéraire européenne* (2013), a broad-based study of the emergence of the modern *conte* from predecessor tales from sixth-century India to the late Middle Ages. Our differing approaches and assumptions render our work complementary, as she concentrates more on structure and individual tale histories in her exploration of the backgrounds of various modern *contes*.

Terminology

Scholars and lay commentators alike understand the terms used in the following chapters in different ways, and so I would like to define the terms that will be used in *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic* before discussion proceeds. Each narrative considered here is a *tale* in terms of its length. In general, this means that each can be told or performed at a single sitting. *The Thousand and One Nights,* or the *Arabian Nights* as it is commonly referred to, consists of longer narratives, but they are divided into brief nightly tellings that Shahrazad's sister Dinarzad refers to as "what has been said"[2] (an Arabic turn of phrase that is usually translated as "story" or "tale"). The publicly performed *Liom/nbruno* analyzed in Chapter 6 consists of two parts, each of which requires about half an hour to present.

Tale *plots* are linear, as Max Lüthi classically described them in *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*, typically lacking subplots that would retard their forward motion. Tale *content*, similarly simple or simplified, rarely provides any explanation of characters' motivations, while tale *prose* calls on a narrow range of adjectives. Heroines are "beautiful," with readers' or listeners' imaginations supplying details. In *Thousand and One Nights,* heroes and heroines are stereotypically "like the moon," with occasional additional details such as swaying hips or eyebrows meeting above the nose.

In tales, both syntax and style are suitable for oral delivery and aural comprehension. Many of the medieval texts treated in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 were read or presented to a listening audience, in the same way that reading entertaining narratives aloud remained a customary practice for all social classes well into the modern period, beginning to die out only when individual private reading became habitual among middle- and upper-class print consumers.

Formal and historico-critical aspects of the tale as a genre have been well treated recently by Patricia Eichel-Lojkine in *Contes en Réseaux* (2013). Of particular importance is her discussion of the tale (*conte*) as "*processual*," a term she adopted from J.-M. Schaeffer (2007: 37). Her observations about tales' oicotypal diffraction in Christian and Jewish European cultures (43) expand the concept of local variants (oicotypes) to larger cultural constructs, while the examples she offers demonstrate

[2] My thanks to Robert Irwin for generously responding to this and many other queries about Arabic vocabulary and usage.

ever-changing intersections of generic constraints with cultural and religious possibilities ("L'identité pluriel du conte," 39–63).

In this study I utilize a psycho-social approach I developed nearly 30 years ago to analyze the corpus of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's tale collection, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Genres lengthier than tales – such as novellas, novels, and dramas – incorporate particularizations about characters and situations, but tales – with their elisions, tropes, and stereotypes – rely on shared assumptions for listeners' comprehension of their fast moving plots and shorthand character descriptions. Such tales inevitably leave blank spaces in the text, precisely because certain explanations were unnecessary for the original audiences, who lived in the same historical and geographical spaces and had been exposed to the same socio-cultural values, tropes, and expectations. Those blanks, however, remain in place for modern readers, who must somehow fill them in to understand the stories that contain them. In other words, how do we come to understand the nature of an implied but unarticulated content? To avoid explicating ancient texts in contemporary terms, caution is required, precisely because tales give voice to the cultural context within which they come into being. My own strategy for filling in the psycho-social blanks of tales from a distant past is to assemble multiple points of confirmation before speculating about the content that historical tellers/writers and listeners/reader shared.

Thinking about a tale's resolution is simpler, because magic tales' verbal resolutions are easily recognized, a gratifying violent punishment for wicked characters with the wish-fulfilling rewards granted to heroes and heroines. Few in number, they clearly signal a story's end.

The tales discussed here may be freestanding or framed, like Shahrazad's tales in *Thousand and One Nights* or Giovan Francesco Straparola's tales told by a merry assembly in *The Pleasant Nights*. Straparola's stories could be read by an individual, such as a merchant on his travels (the reader so often alluded to in other sixteenth-century tale collections). Authors often built an audience into the frametale, an audience that could be understood as a fictively shared social context for its reader. If the same tales were told aloud, they would be listened to within a group, that is, within an actually shared social context that incorporated everything appropriate to that situation: food, wine, jolly spirits, and joshing wordplay much like that depicted within Straparola's frametale.

Jewish or Christian sermon tales entail situational contexts far different from the secular merriment of private or social readings. In a shared religious space, listening to a magic tale ensures a conscious awareness of a transcendent moral, ethical, or religious framework for

a magic tale's reception, with neither wine-bibbing, rib-tickling, nor eye-winking. Authors must have borne in mind the social effect that a literary, social, or religious framing might have had on readers' and listeners' responses, and it is enticing to consider the effect their awareness might have had on individual authors' organization, presentation, and composition of their tales.

Learned magic rarely appears in the tales discussed in *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic*. Hints of astrology occasionally surface, usually as a proverb that could be understood in multiple ways. A lapidary assertion that marriages are made in heaven could, for instance, refer to the effect of a heavenly constellation's alignment on the course of a tale protagonist's life, could affirm the centrality of divinely ordained predestination, or could reflect cultural wisdom. Alchemy is equally absent from magic tales, and so is ritual magic. There is no Hermes Tresmegithus or Paracelsus to be found in these tales, for most magical procedures as described in handbooks of magic take more time and exactitude in ingredient preparation than is possible to recount in magic tales, which are by definition brief. Instead, such tales favor the instantaneous, such as sudden transformations, immediate travel across vast distances, and swiftly won victories. The prime counter examples for these observations are to be found in Medea's utilization of occult knowledge in Chapter 2 and Straparola's description of invoking a demon's assistance in Chapter 7.

Popular magic practice is as absent as learned magic in these tales. Nowhere are the relics and blessed objects described by Richard Kieckhefer, the historian of medieval magic, to be found in magic tales or fairy tales (2000: 78). As for the *Arabian Nights*, their magic seems to have come latterly, for in the fifteenth-century *Alf Layla wa-Layla* there are neither magic lamps nor flying carpets. In fact, the great majority of the entries for "magic" in *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (2004) pertain to stories that wouldn't join the *Nights* canon until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In one exception to the general rule outlined above, an Egyptian gains magic powers by ingestion, when he soaks the pages of a magic book in beer and drinks the resulting brew (Chapter 2).

The tales discussed here were originally composed in languages other than English, and I have used English translations for their ancient hieroglyphic, Greek, Hebrew, or Arabic voicings. Because translations inevitably absorb something of the age in which they were translated, I have tried to get as close as I could to the sense of original wordings by referring to at least two different translations, whenever that was possible. Despite my best efforts, my own translations will necessarily bear the marks of the twenty-first century.

All of the tales discussed here offer *perceived magic*, in the particular sense of what the stories' characters and sometimes the stories' authors perceive to break natural law or to exist above natural law and therefore to belong to the realm of what they understand as supernatural. Similarly, magical agents who are perceived within the contexts of the tales themselves to be extraordinary (demons, fairies, sorcerers and sorceresses) are understood to produce magical results. Their supernatural identities are a kind of shorthand for the magic often absent from the page. Implicit in many Jewish, Christian and Muslim magic tales is an assumption that God is the supreme magic-producing agent. It was surprising to me to find that another class of events, those that are extranatural and improbable and that are perceived to be implausible, elicit the same kind of amazement from fictive characters and frametale listeners as does magic itself.

What we today call *fairy tales* were a new genre when they appeared in print in the early 1550s. Their fabricator, Giovan Francesco Straparola, often used existing motifs and characters to fashion tales in which magic brought about a happy ending, which in his tales consists of marriage to a royal personage, subsequent progeny, and a long and comfortable life. Among Straparola's many magic tales, it is the happy ending that distinguishes his "fairy tales" from the magic tales in his collection, a subject discussed in Chapter 7.

Fairy tales are brief, structurally linear, stylistically and syntactically simple, or "compact," to use Elizabeth Harries' term (2001:16–18). Fairy tales differ in several ways from *fairyland fictions* (Bottigheimer, 2010: 462–3), which play no role in the following discussions. Fairyland fictions are generally "complex" (Harries, 2001:16–18), which means that they are structurally and syntactically complex, lengthy, and stylistically rich. Fairyland fictions are often existentially doubled, with a fairy world paralleling the human world, into and out of which both fairies and humans move. A literary continuation into the early modern world of the medieval *matière de Bretagne*, an important component of western literary tradition from the high Middle Ages onward, fairyland fictions' doubled reality of a fairy realm and a human world incorporates a sense that the material world of everyday life is subordinate to a divine or supernatural world and reality. Fairyland fictions also differ significantly from fairy tales in that they can end badly, as do Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy's dystopic "L'Île de la Félicité" (The Island of Happiness), "Le Mouton" (The Ram), and "Le Nain jaune" (The Yellow Dwarf). Typically the *dramatis personae* of fairyland fictions foregrounds aristocrats and favors the interests of the nobly born, whereas fairy tales often incorporate the humbly born along with the aristocrat.

Most readers of this study will come to it with some knowledge of fairy tales and their magic. When fairy tale magic emerged in the tales of Giovan Francesco Straparola in the Renaissance, its constellation of characteristics differed from that of the magic in medieval romances, their immediate antecedents and their literary predecessors. Straparola's fairy tale magic is human-centered. That is to say, his fairies direct the beneficial effects of their fairy tale magic toward human beings, not toward other supernaturals. Fairy tale supernaturals typically have no explanatory backstories from a life in a parallel world, and consistent with those absent biographies, helpful fairy figures generally appear from nowhere, do their job, and then depart for parts unknown, as in Straparola's "Prince Pig" (II.1):

> "And it chanced that while she slept there passed by three fairies who held mankind somewhat in scorn, and these, when they beheld the sleeping queen, halted, and gazing upon her beauty, took counsel together how they might protect her and throw a spell upon her."
>
> After the three do so, they fly away. (Straparola, 1898:1:134–5)

It's true that these fairies are said to have little regard for mankind, but Straparola writes in no explanatory emotions to account for the third fairy's contrary wish.

Fairy tale magic takes place in this world, the world in which its protagonists (whether royal or ragamuffin) live and seek their happiness. If the tales' heroes leave the earth's familiar surface on an enchanted horse, it is to fly to a real geographical location like Cairo or Damascus ("Livoretto," III.2). Consistent with its earthbound geography is fairy tale magic's push for human-centered well-being. That is to say, fairy tale magic moves a plot toward a happy ending that encompasses physical comfort (enough to eat), social success (marriage to a royal), and reproductive permanence (children to succeed them):

> "... they all embarked and returned together to Capraia, where with sumptuous feastings and rejoicings Peter was duly married to Luciana, and lived with her in great honour and contentment until Luciano died, and then he became king in his stead." ("Peter the Fool," III.1)

> "After the space of a few days Bellisandra and Livoretto were married amidst the rejoicings of the whole people, and thus with the princess as his lawful spouse, with sumptuous triumphs and feastings, and with the happiest omens, Livoretto was made the Sultan of Cairo,

> where for many years he governed his realm in peace and lived a life of pleasure and tranquillity." ("Livoretto," III.2)
>
> "... and the King Ferrandino with Biancabella and Samaratana lived long and happily, and when Ferrandino died his son succeeded to his kingdom." ("Biancabella," III.3)
>
> "And by these means Costantino rose from an estate of poverty or even beggary to be a powerful king, and lived long with Elisetta his wife, leaving children by her to be the heirs of his kingdom." ("Costantino Fortunato," XI.1)

In a few instances, fairy tale magic retards the achievement of a happy end. Exemplified by the third fairy's curse in Straparola's "Prince Pig," it sets in play the need for the titular hero to achieve happiness only in a third marriage. Later fairy tale authors, such as Giambattista Basile, would thematize such a retardation in his "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (V.5), a recasting of the Franco-Iberian romance "Perceforest" as a fairy tale. Charles Perrault did the same in the 1690s with a hundred-year slumber caused by a fairy curse, which he accounts for by inventing fairy anger at not having been included in the princess's christening banquet.

The constellation of human-centered magic agents and effects that characterize fairy tale magic is a persistent grouping that becomes institutionalized in the narrative universe from the mid-1500s onward. Traces of such magic occasionally surface before the 1550s, as in the first story considered in this study, the ancient Egyptian "Shipwrecked Sailor," whose monstrous supernatural serpent promises prosperity, a good death, and eternal rest to a shipwrecked sailor. Another hint appears in a medieval Jewish tale, but is undermined in its frametale by the assertion that the evident impossibility represented by the tale as a whole (including its happy ending) shows the power of God to achieve the impossible. None of these magically mediated poor person's happily-ever-after here on earth took hold, either in ancient Egypt or in medieval Europe. There simply wasn't sufficient confirmation for this plot in the ambient culture, even as a fantasy of wish fulfillment, to support retellings, and such plots died aborning.

Text choice

It remains to account for the texts that I discuss in the following chapters. Some will wonder why I do not include ancient Sumerian tales like the

Inana or Dumuzi tales with their occasional demons, water turning to blood, counterfactual journey to the underworld, and dream prophecy. Ancient Indian and Chinese tales are similarly absent, even though they sometimes contain motifs that recur in medieval Mediterranean and northern European tales, such as the mythic Hindu giant bird Garuda, capable of bearing a passenger aloft, and occasionally credited as the narrative ancestor of the ebony horse in the Arabic *Thousand and One Nights* (Chapter 3). In contrast to these isolated antecedents, the tales and tale traditions examined here participate in a linked discourse. Greek authors recognized the shape and some of the content of Egyptian magic tales; authors in the Roman Empire knew the Greek narrative world intimately; early Muslim writers translated much Greek learning and literature into Arabic and absorbed many Homeric adventures into their literary translations. In the Middle Ages there was well-documented exchange among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literatures.

All of the medieval magic tales discussed here are datable to the early 1500s or before. I did not have access to a datable text of *Sindbad the Sailor* and so it does not form part of the chapter devoted to medieval Muslim magic tales, although its tales clearly circulated in the Muslim Middle Ages. Neither does the "Egyptian" Rhodopis tale appear here, but for a different reason. Its age is indisputable, but the shoe-dropped-into-a-pharaoh's-lap exemplifies a high degree of improbability and is thus implausible but not impossible (Bottigheimer, 2010: 453), literary parameters directly related to the fairy tale genre that I address in Chapters 4, 6, and 7. I also have not included the "Chinese Cinderella," purportedly a ninth-century precursor for Charles Perrault's well-known version (Waley, 1947; Ting, 1974) because of personal reservations about the tale's history, which I will explore in another place.

2
Egyptian, Greek, and Roman Magic Tales

Middle and New Kingdom magic tales

One of the world's most ancient recorded stories tells of a sailor shipwrecked on a distant island. Just as he gives thanks for his deliverance, a monstrously large, gold-skinned serpent with blue eyebrows approaches. The serpent asks who brought him to these shores, which the sailor, prostrating himself, answers by telling of the wreck and his survival. In a sympathetic response, the serpent recounts his own sad history and promises the sailor rich gifts, a prosperous future, and death and burial in his homeland (Lichtheim, 1973: 1: 211–15; Simpson, 1972: 50–6[1]).

Preserved on a nearly 4,000-year-old Egyptian Middle Kingdom papyrus, the story has three features familiar from later magic tales: a shipwreck, a monster, and a promise of untold wealth. The ancient Egyptian tale, dated by a copyist's mark to the early XIIth dynasty between 1991 and 1786 BCE, was written, according to one scholar, in a period in which popular superstition came to be expressed more freely and "monsters took a new lease on life" (Fischer, 1987: 17; Petrie, 1895: 45; Simpson, 1972: 5, 50).

Despite its familiar setting (shipwreck) and characters (sailor and monster), the story transports us into an alien world. The monster is stranger than any fire-breathing dragon, with its beard, gold-plated skin, and eyebrows[2] of lapis lazuli. Equally strange to modern eyes is the

[1] Since this chapter was written, Hasan El-Shamy has edited and republished Gaston Maspero's well-annotated 1915 *Popular Stories of Ancient Egypt*.

[2] "[E]yebrows" in Lichtheim (1973: 1: 212), "markings" in Simpson (1972: 52), "colour" in Petrie (1999: 39).

sailor's response to the monster: he repeatedly abases himself – belly to the ground, arms bent before him, face covered – promising to honor the monster in the future, and offering gifts now. To the monster, the sailor is, and remains, insignificant and inconsequential.

Triply framed, the story is as literarily complex as it is culturally alien. Its primary narrator is a scribe who states in the manuscript that he, Amen-aa, son of Ameny, has copied the tale from a written source. A second internal narrator, identified as a worthy attendant of Egypt's monarch, recounts the entire tale to a noble listener as an adventure that he had himself experienced. Within the attendant's tale lies a third embedded tale about the serpent's miraculous escape from a star's fiery destruction of his beloved daughter along with his 75 brothers and their children. In the scribe's skillful literary structure, doubling plays a prominent role,[3] with two descriptions of the ship and its sailors, of the storm that destroys all save one, and of the serpent's ultimate gifts. Suffusing the entire tale is the strangely compelling motif of a human encounter with the supernatural.

The magic in "The Shipwrecked Sailor" recalls the odd magic in other Middle Kingdom tales, such as those told to King Cheops in the Westcar Papyrus. In "The Boating Party" (Lichtheim, 1973: 1: 216–17), a royal magician sets one half of a lake's water atop the water of the other half to recover a precious jewel lost in its depths.[4] In another tale, a magician called Djedi knows how to rejoin a severed head to a goose, a heron, or an ox without disturbing or distressing the animal (ibid.: 217–20). And in "The Birth of the Royal Children," divinely sired triplets come into the world wearing crowns of lapis lazuli, their limbs overlaid with gold (ibid.: 220–2).

Each of these ancient Egyptian magical interludes has analogues in later taletelling traditions, but the Egyptian displacement of the human protagonist from the narrative center in favor of a supernatural creature, a supernatural ability, or a strangely alien appearance commands our attention, for this displacement contrasts so sharply with the centrality of human figures in modern fairy tales. It is as though a monster's overwhelming magical appearance stands for the overwhelmingly dominant

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[3] Simpson points out later allusions to the tale of the sailor shipwrecked on the island of serpents (1958: 50 ff.). Brunner-Traut writes of the spread of Egyptian narrative material in general (1974: 51–65).

[4] Removing waters from their seabed parallels, and perhaps prefigures, Moses' creating a dry seabed for the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, even though the method of and intent for removal differs.

pharaonic figure in ancient Egypt's social structure. On the other hand, nothing stands between the man and the monster; no intermediary magician directs the tale's mantic forces, and in this respect an ancient Egyptian tale like "The Shipwrecked Sailor" is consistent with modern fairy godmothers, who simply enter a tale to benefit its protagonist.

The magic in the stories told to King Cheops in the Westcar Papyrus, on the other hand, mixes its contexts. In some, the pharaoh confronts magic directly, but in others the pharaoh calls for magic to be performed on his behalf by a magician, a worker of magic by profession. Thus some of the Westcar papyrus tales bear a resemblance to fairyland fictions, with their fëerie running parallel to but conceptually separate from human life.

The Middle Kingdom was followed by the five-century-long New Kingdom (c1570–c1070 BCE). Tales surviving from that era include mythic episodes with divinities and impossible apparitions, such as a ship of stone, as well as tales of parallel worlds (this life and the land of the dead), between which people can be ferried. But for the most part New Kingdom tales of magic are characterized by magical transformations, in which strange impregnations turn natural processes upside down and the laws of nature fade.

The most famous New Kingdom tale is "The Two Brothers" (Lichtheim, 1973: 2: 203–11; Simpson, 1972: 92–107), which survives in a single papyrus from the thirteenth century BCE (Simpson, 1958: 5). Discovered in 1852, its systematic study began only in 1925 (Wettengel 2006). A stunning range of motifs familiar from ancient Bible stories and the modern fairy tale canon are prefigured in its more than 3,000-year-old plot. There is a failed seduction and a subsequent accusation like that in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife; a speaking cow that gives good advice; a magical river that protects the hero from pursuit; a separable soul; an evil prophecy; love for an unknown woman caused by seeing a single hair from her head; a wife's fatal betrayal of her husband's secret; resuscitation from death; reincarnation; and triply occurring events. Despite its motivic and thematic familiarity, the sequence of events in the New Kingdom "Two Brothers" tale is as confoundingly strange to modern eyes as the earlier Middle Kingdom tale of "The Shipwrecked Sailor":

> Two brothers live together. The elder, Anubis, is married; his younger brother Bata labors for him in the fields. When Anubis's wife tries to seduce Bata, he flees, but she claims that Bata had attempted rape. A cow warns Bata that his enraged brother is in pursuit, but the gods interpose a river filled with crocodiles to help him escape. From the far

side Bata tells his brother what has happened, then castrates himself, while assuring Anubis that if he, Bata, is ever in mortal danger, the wine in his (Anubis's) cup will darken. Anubis returns home and kills his perfidious wife.

Bata removes his heart from his body and hides it in the top of a pine tree, where it protects him from danger. Then the sun god Ra fashions Bata a beautiful wife, whom he warns to be careful of the sea. When a hair from her head falls into the water, the current carries it to Pharaoh, who sends messengers to fetch her to him. Bata kills them, but Pharaoh reaches her by means of an old woman who lures her away. She agrees to live with Pharaoh and betrays her husband by revealing the location of his heart.

Anubis's wine immediately darkens, and he goes in search of Bata's heart, reunites it with Bata's body, and restores his brother to life. Bata then turns himself into a magnificent bull which Pharaoh buys, but after Bata reveals himself to his wife, she betrays him again and has Pharaoh slaughter him.

From the bull's blood grow two trees, one of which ceaselessly calls out his wife's name. In a third betrayal, she has Pharaoh cut down the two trees, but a chip from one of the trees flies into her mouth and impregnates her. The son that is born is Bata in yet another form, but the unwitting Pharaoh, believing him to be his son, names him crown prince. At Pharaoh's death, the apparent son succeeds to the throne, punishes his faithless wife, rules for thirty years, and is succeeded by his brother Anubis.

Familiar fairy tale motifs permeate the magical "Two Brothers" tale, but in its alien plot the tale achieves dynastic ambitions rather than satisfying the requirement for individual well-being in a happy ending, the condition so characteristic of modern fairy tales. Classic fairy tale scholars such as Jan de Vries and Karel Horálek doubt that it can even be considered an early *folk* tale, set as it is not within a folk community, but within divine and royal spheres, while Wolfgang Wettengel further distances "The Two Brothers" from folk tradition in asserting that it is a document composed by or for the royal heir Sethos II to provide a divine lineage for the Ramesside monarchs (Wettengel, 2006: 16) and in defining it as an early enthronement narrative (ibid.: 4). In one way or another, magic in these tales is either in the province or prerogative of pharaonic power. Only in the "Shipwrecked Sailor" does the happiness (prosperity now, good death later) of a mortal here on earth play a role.

Stories of the Ptolemaic period

Ptolemaic stories, composed between 1000 BCE and 100 CE, differ altogether from the Middle and New Kingdom magic tales that preceded them. In Ptolemaic stories a pharaonic ruler remains at the center of Egyptian identity, but the stories themselves incorporate episodes that seem to recapitulate historical developments from the reign of Rameses II (c 1225 BCE) and from the even earlier generation of Amenhotep III (c 1375 BCE). In novella-length stories of Setne Khamwas of the Ptolemaic period (Lichtheim, 1973: 3:125–51), voyages up and down the Nile appear to stand for historical contact between competing monarchies of the upper and lower Nile: the sorcery competitions between Horus-son-of-Paneshe and Horus-son-of-the-Nubian-woman seem to represent an ancient, long unresolved, and slow separation of ancient pharaonic Egypt, as we commonly think of it (pyramids, Thebes, Memphis) from its even more ancient origins further south ("up the Nile") in Nubia. The sense of "Egypt" in these stories is of an entity in motion along a historical continuum.

Narratives from this period, like the Setne Khamwas stories, incorporate accounts of a vividly enacted rivalry between magicians from Nubia and ones from Egypt that end with an Egyptian's triumph and the Nubian's promise to stay clear of Egypt for 1500 years. The overall story concludes at the end of that period, with the Nubian sorcerer's return and his accompanying challenge to Egypt. As the complex stories unfold, Egyptians beat back Nubian challengers, and later events clarify earlier episodes in an intellectually engaging manner. A large picture emerges in which the author claims, and shows, that the gods demonstrate their preference for Egyptians, their pharaoh, Egypt, and Egypt's inhabitants, by protecting them against upriver Nubian antagonists. Literarily sophisticated, the Ptolemaic Setne Khamwas stories present Egypt and Egyptian-ness in a manner newly self-aware of itself as a community.

In the last three centuries BCE and the first three centuries CE, the Hellenistic and Roman worlds deeply influenced Egypt's economy and governance, making it reasonable to assume, as did Flinders Petrie long ago (1895: 134), that its literary imagination had also been affected. Something central, perhaps a sense of Egypt's undeniable loss of cultural and political dominance, underlay changes in the kinds of stories that were told and the manner in which their component parts were represented.

Magic is a case in point. As in the earlier "Two Brothers," dramatic signs, such as darkening wine, inform a helper that a character faces

grave danger. In the Setne Khamwas stories, the Nubian Horus makes blood-red colors appear in the sky, in his mother's food, and in her drink as a sign for her to rise up, go forth, and save her son. All other forms of magic in the Setne Khamwas stories, however, are ones that are quantifiable in real world terms. Skilled sorcerers know how to prepare spells for amulets bound on the body to protect their wearers. In these tales, magic becomes a tool for the hand that possesses it. Above all, they know how to make wax images, to recite spells to the images, to breathe life into them, and to have them carry out the sorcerers' directives, so that through their crafted images, sorcerers transport a rival monarch into their own kingdom and maltreat him humiliatingly before sending him home. Once again, magic serves dynastic ends.

In Ptolemaic tales, gaining magical power is a *physical* undertaking. For instance, *possessing* the book of magic written by the great god Thoth confers the power to wield the book's magic. Gaining access to the book, an arduous undertaking, requires overpowering six miles of serpents, scorpions, and reptiles surrounding the seven boxes encased one inside the other. Made respectively of iron, copper, juniper, ivory, ebony, silver, and gold, the last contains the sought-after sacred book. As though to emphasize magic's physicality, the owner of Thoth's book literally ingests its knowledge:

> First he copied every word onto new papyrus, soaked the papyrus in beer, dissolved it in water, and drank the resulting brew. This gained him complete knowledge of the book's contents. (Lichtheim, 1973: 3: 131; Petrie, 1895: 138).[5]

Although the appropriator of Thoth's magic powers ultimately dies, because he isn't the person appointed to bear Thoth's magic, that fact is less important than the physical manner in which he acquires the book's magical knowledge. A similar sense of the physical thinginess of magical abilities emerges from the description of the Nubian sorcerer Horus, who hurried down to Egypt "crammed with sorcery," in the words of Miriam Lichtheim (1973: 3:148).

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[5] It is interesting to note that a 2012 New York State Supreme Court case involved precisely the same procedure. Cheik Ndal, called as an expert in Senegalese spells, testified that he had helped an infertile woman become pregnant by writing verses from the Koran on a piece of paper and having her soak the paper in water, which she then drank, after which she became pregnant (Yee, 2012: A24).

New Kingdom tales are rich in motifs that survived into, or were revived in, modern times. Constituting a veritable catalog of later magic-tale elements, they also provide enough plot elements common to the Egyptian tales, the Hebrew Bible, and modern fairy tales to suggest that the Old Testament functioned as a significant link in a chain of transmission and dissemination of fairy tale motifs from the ancient to the modern world:

1. The long-barren couple who have a son through supernatural intervention in the Egyptian New Kingdom tradition closely parallels the Old Testament story of the aged Abraham, his barren wife Sarah, the angel who promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the infant Isaac born to Sarah.
2. Egyptian magic wands parallel those belonging to Moses and Aaron in the land of Pharaoh.
3. Speaking animals remind us of Balaam's ass.
4. Two rival brothers could be Jacob and Esau, although unlike Bata and Anubis, the Biblical brothers don't achieve eventual harmony.
5. Contests between Pharaoh's magicians and foreign sorcerers recall, and parallel, Biblical accounts of Moses and Aaron dueling with Pharaoh's sorcerers.

Whether ancient Hebrew stories borrowed from Egyptian ones or whether it was the other way round (though most modern Biblical scholars hold that the former is true) is of less significance than that ultimately the Hebrew Bible mediated motifs from ancient Egyptian magic tales to the modern world. So, too, did Renaissance study of Roman texts provide a link between ancient Egypt and early modern Europe. François Rabelais, for instance, reported learning about Egyptian monsters from reading the Roman Lucian (Fischer, 1987: 13).

Plots, characters, and characterizations of Egypt's magic tales describe a worldview notably distinct from that in Greek and Roman tales. The tale of a long-barren couple's son, a doomed prince, who does not and cannot escape his predicted fate, parallels the inexorability of Oedipus's predicted fate, but the protagonists of Greek and Roman magic tales do not prostrate themselves before an omnipotent monarch who functions as a divinity-on-earth. Instead, Greek and Roman heroes and monarchs share the same fleshly debts to their mortal existence from birth through life to death and interment. That simple fact imbues magic stories of ancient Greece and Rome with a sense of humanity to which modern readers can still relate, while most Egyptian magic

tales exemplify social relationships that distance their protagonists so greatly from one another that their plots remain largely alien to modern readers.

Magic tales of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds

The most ancient Greek narratives known to us in the modern world are myths of origins. Some portray the generation of the gods themselves followed by their elementally ferocious achievements of individual primacy: conniving against her brutal husband, Kronos's mother instructed her son precisely how and when to castrate his father.

Again differing from Egyptian divinities, many gods and goddesses in the early Greek pantheon personify earthborn forces (such as earthquakes) and natural phenomena (such as wind, water, vegetation, and human and animal life). Many such narratives address questions of origins, such as, "How did the waters of the world – the springs, lakes, rivers, seas, and oceans – come into existence?" with narrative answers: they sprang from the union of the Titan Oceanus with his sister Tethys.

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (c800 BCE) and Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* (c700 BCE) are rich sources for Greek mythology. The *Homeric Hymns,* composed over a span of two centuries in the 600s and 500s BCE, describe divinities such as the radiant moon goddess Selene driving her shining team of horses across the heavens. Inserted into Selene's hymn is a tiny history, just a few lines long, that recounts Zeus's loving union with her which produced the shimmering creature Pandia, whose beauty may be understood as the light of the moon – hence, another myth of origins.

The many peoples who populated the Greek mainland, the Cycladic islands, the coastal areas of the Black Sea, and the coast and mainland of today's Turkey migrated from the north and the east. Each brought along myths of origins, which accounts for a considerable range of local variations in Greek myth. As ancient Greeks encountered peoples on their cultural periphery, they absorbed new narratives and story elements, with the result that the specifics of tales about major and minor divinities differ from one place to another, as well as changing over time.

Stories about Phoebus Apollo provide an excellent example both of local variation and chronological change. Over centuries, stories of the divinity Phoebus slowly merged with those of Apollo to produce Phoebus Apollo. His birth then became a myth in its own right about the Delian Apollo, which tells of the pregnant Leto wandering the

Greek mainland and islands in search of a place that will accept her. When she promises to build a great temple in conjunction with an oracle on the island of Delos, averring that it would bring them great wealth, she finally finds refuge, and hence a place to give birth. The myth of Pythian Apollo, on the other hand, gives evidence of a historic displacement of an earth goddess in a different location, Delphi. And finally, because of the prominence of Apollonian myth as a whole, and because of Apollo's special attributes, over time he comes into contact – sometimes sexual, sometimes competitive – with a variety of mortals and immortals (which nearly always ends badly for his partners), producing narrative cycles characterized by processes of amalgamation and reformulation.

Similarly, Selene moon stories and Artemis fertility myths mingled over the course of centuries with chaste huntress narratives producing locally varying goddess figures, one of the most startling of which is the many-breasted, animal-draped, and disk-crowned Artemis of Ephesus, a cult figure that lurks behind Chapter 19 of the Biblical Acts of the Apostles, where a silversmith named Demetrius, a maker of silver shrines of Artemis, voices his concerns about losing his livelihood if the disciple Paul's teachings cause the great temple of Artemis at Ephesus to fall into disrepute (Acts 19: 23–29).

The mythic narratives discussed above show the complex interrelationships in narrative genres. As tales of origins, they differ from magic tales, but the divinities who populate those tales also magically shapeshift in other tales, and help or hinder heroes in encounters with monsters who, by definition, belong to the world of magic.

Memorialized on the Parthenon's frieze, cross-species centaurs, half man and half horse, occupy a disproportionately large space in memories of Greek monsters. Most other ancient Greek monsters are variations from a norm. Instead of two eyes, they have one, like Cyclops. Or instead of one head they have many, like the 50-headed Hecatonchires, born from the union of Gaia (Earth) and Uranus (Sky). Or they behave abnormally, emerging from the sea to entangle Laokoon and his sons. The narrative richness of Greek myth produced monsters of a sort that survived in human memory to animate later magic tales.

Interactions between humans and the gods and goddesses of early Greek myth come to the fore in Homer's epic poetry, with Olympus's alliances and hatreds reflected in gods' and goddesses' competing support for Greek and Trojan warriors. Shapeshifting abounds, and gigantic figures and forces in disparate shapes threaten destruction to Odysseus, as well as to his companions who fall to supernatural adversaries.

Earthly sorceresses, too, endangered Odysseus's companions. On the island of Aeaea all but Odysseus and Eurylochus turned into swine when Circe

> mixed them a potion – cheese, barley
> and pale honey mulled in Pramnian wine –
> but into the brew she stirred her wicked drugs
> to wipe from their memories any thoughts of home.
> Once they'd drained the bowls she filled, suddenly
> she struck with her wand, drove them into her pigsties,
> all of them bristling into swine – with grunts,
> snouts – even their bodies, yes . . . (Homer, 1996: Book 10: ll. 257–64)

When Odysseus pleads for their restoration, Circe anoints them with a new magic oil that undoes the effects of the first wicked drug and renders them taller and more handsome than before and with their memories returned.

In succeeding centuries, the ancient Greek-speaking world developed into small, independent city-states, organized into larger but loose systems of alliances. The many Hellenic city-states shared a belief system more or less in common, but local versions of stories about their divinities still differed in detail. Look where we may, we find no brief narratives in which beneficent magic – whether embodied in or mediated by gods, goddesses, demigods, or natural spirits – acts on behalf of ordinary men or women to bring about earthly reward or here-and-now happiness. There are wisdom tales that communicate stark warnings against making wishes or asking supernaturals to grant special favors: one need only remember the awful consequences of King Midas's wish for his touch to turn whatever he touched to gold. At its most beneficent, magic, in the form of an oil that undoes a prior enchantment, restores Odysseus's men to their human form. For the rest, a golden touch threatens Midas with physical starvation (because everything he touches turns to incomestible gold) and emotional loss, as every*one* he embraces stiffens into the precious metal.

What remains are occasional tales of malicious magic, such as Medea's horrifying abilities that Euripides memorialized in in his late fifth-century drama. Even though it is not a "tale," that is, a brief narrative, Medea's story as we know it from Euripides must be addressed, because Medea's sorcery so well manifests the malice that seems to drive the magic in ancient tales. Euripides's Medea, a granddaughter of the sun and a devotee of Hecate, claims credit for saving Jason from

fire-breathing bulls and magical warriors and for slaying the monstrous snake guarding the Golden Fleece (1974: ll. 475–87). But having been set aside so that Jason can marry a new wife, Medea becomes "a dangerous woman" (l. 40). She steeps a gown and a golden diadem in deadly poisons which her sons deliver as wedding gifts to Jason's bride. Putting them on, "her color changes . . . white froth spuming at her lips, her eyeballs bulging all askew," and "[t]he golden diadem that clasped her head burst into a voracious and uncanny flow of fire, while the robe of gossamer [her] children gave her began to eat her tender flesh away" (ll. 1168–88). The sorceress then kills her (and Jason's) two sons and departs together with their dead bodies in a chariot drawn by dragons.

Medea's magic first gains her the husband she passionately yearns for, and then utterly destroys his joy and hers. On Jason's side, Medea's magic wins him the Golden Fleece and ten years of marriage but makes him an alien in the city of Corinth without a secure future. When he approaches royal status by aspiring to the hand of King Creon's daughter, Medea's magic destroys his hopes.

The absence in Greece of fairy tales of the modern sort with their magically mediated happy endings for riff-raff and royalty alike is surprising, and the noted classicist Stephanie West pointed out that "[t]he lack of references in Greek literature to storytellers and *Märchen* has often excited comment" (2003: 65).[6] Evidently, the many parallels in motif but not in plot between ancient Greek myths and modern fairy tales designate a cultural transfer of building blocks (motifs) that only much later became part of fairy tale plots.

Neither at the time of Athenian hegemony nor under Alexander the Great nor during the Hellenistic period as a whole were Greek stories about their gods and goddesses gathered into a single, internally consistent narrative. That happened first in Rome around the turn of the millennium, when Ovid composed the *Metamorphoses*. Publius Ovidius Naso was born in 43 BCE in provincial Sumona, on the eastern side of the mountainous Italian spine. Poetry came easily to him, and from an early age he wrote and published copiously. Greek myths crept into his *Art of Love*, with its stories of Daedalus and Icarus, Cephalus and Procris, and Theseus and Ariadne. Talented and charming, Ovid (who once said that poetry flowed from his lips of its own accord) took pleasure

[6] West based her statement on A. Scobie, "Storytellers, storytelling, and the novel in Graeco-Roman antiquity," *RhM* 122 (1979): 229–59. Even Albert Wesselski, with his more elastic definition of "Märchen" asserts its absence from Greek and Roman antiquity (1931: 57).

in Rome's literary salons. In style he followed the witty verse of his contemporaries, but in mid-life Ovid's fortunes shifted consequentially. Just as he finished *Metamorphoses* in 8 CE, Ovid was banished to the far reaches of the Roman Empire to a painfully isolated life on the western shores of the Black Sea. It is certainly possible that his sudden removal from Rome resulted from a literary inadvertence in the *Metamorphoses*, for in one of its last stories, a character advocates killing a ruler, which, in the years directly after Julius Caesar's assassination, showed a risky lapse of judgment on Ovid's part. It was just as the *Metamorphoses* was becoming public that he went into exile, where he remained until his death in 17 CE at the age of 60.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* brought together Greek stories since studied by numberless generations of pupils of Latin: the creation, the flood, the Titans, their successors the gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus, stories of the human origins of countless trees, rocks, and birds, as well as the human causes of the Trojan War. To all of that, Ovid added material with Roman coloration, such as the wanderings of Ulysses and of Aeneas, the founding of Rome, the assassination of Julius Caesar, and the reign of Augustus Caesar.

The 15 books of the *Metamorphoses* begin with the formless chaos of an evolving universe and conclude with an ordered universe under Augustan rule. Within the overall transformation from originary chaos to Roman order, Ovid details some 250 metamorphoses of divine bodies. A staple in the repertoire of magic, metamorphosis is one of the forms of magic that typically enables fairy tale heroes and heroines to ward off danger, perform impossible tasks, withstand supernatural trials, and achieve earthly happiness. But Ovid's metamorphoses change gods and goddesses into forms that enable them to waylay and overpower earthly beings. In stories that account for the existence of specific laurel bushes, maple, oak, or evergreen trees, beautiful damsels fleeing from divine but unwelcome lovers see bark cover their bodies and watch their hair turn to leaves. Other girls in flight turn into bears, heifers, crows, rocks, and rivers, although now and again a vicious deity is punished by being transformed into a rock or a bird. Whatever else metamorphic magic achieves, it is not a happily-ever-after ending for the tales' boys and girls, men and women.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* embodies a grand vision of Mediterranean storytelling, with stories arranged to make it easy for readers to understand that vision. Chaos came first, then the flood, and then Egyptian power, which he identifies by repeated references to the Nile and its annual flooding. Ovid also works in explanations of Egypt's early dominance

by declaring that the Nile stopped Io's wanderings or that the sun dried up the river when Phaethon passed too close to the earth in his disastrous attempt to drive the chariot of the sun across the heavens.

Ovid retains the characteristically Egyptian primacy of the sun and of its deity Ra when he details the sun's role in creating animals from moist muck. Even more telling is Ovid's retention of the color blue as a marker of divinity – his Jupiter's azure brow[7] recalls the lapis lazuli on the brows of pharaohs and their consorts, as well as on the face of the monster that begins this chapter. Similarly many of Ovid's early stories in the *Metamorphoses*, such as Deucalion and Pyrrha, maintain the quintessentially Egyptian royal practice of brother–sister marriage.

Ovid stresses a developmental link between Egyptian origins and subsequent Greek gods and goddesses, repeatedly reminding readers that the king and queen of the Greek pantheon, Jupiter and Juno (to use Ovid's Latin names for Zeus and Hera) were brother and sister. Like the Greeks who named their chief deity Zeus Ammon, Ovid surnames the king of the Greek pantheon Ammon. His "Jupiter Ammon," at the end of Book IV and again at the beginning of Book V, recalls and clearly incorporates the Egyptian god Amun into his Latin-language stories of Greek mythology. In subsequent books, however, Ovid's stories begin gradually to imply that civilized society rejects incestuous marriages, so that by Book IX, Byblis, besotted with love for her brother Caunus, recognizes that her love is both wicked and unnatural, although she continues to invoke the gods as a model for her incestuous desires. As Byblis learns to her cost, brother–sister unions remain in the distant past between deities governed by laxer laws.

Ovid envisages the Greek narrative world in triplicate:

1. a present time in which actions actually take place,
2. a present parallel universe of powerful divinities who intrude into the human world and require sacrificial propitiation,
3. and a mythologized history, in which past events account for the shape – as in rocks and woods – of the contemporary human world.

Of these three, only the gods' and goddesses' parallel world is contiguous with the magically parallel worlds of medieval, early modern, and modern fairyland fictions. By Book XIV, the next to last in the

[7] "Nec renuit Iovis caerulum supercilium…" Apuleius, 1965: Book VI, 258, paragraph 7.

Metamorphoses, Ovid moves beyond the physically brutal punishments and retributions among protagonists of the Greek world to accounts of humane judgments rendered by Rome's mythic founder Romulus. When the Nile reappears in the final book, it is as a river conquered by Julius Caesar and brought under Roman rule. Caesar's assassination changes nothing, as Rome's enlightened rule continues under Ovid's much praised contemporary, Augustus.

A mighty intellectual achievement, the *Metamorphoses* demonstrates Ovid's mastery of Greece's vast body and disparate components of mythic narrative. At the height of his literary powers, he unites them into a single overarching vision by focusing on a single aspect in all the stories he retold – transformations.

Gripped by the intersection of Jason and Medea's lives, Ovid wrote a now lost tragic drama. In composing the *Metamorphoses* Ovid made their tale one of its longest stories. He lingers over Medea's passionate love for Jason, his promise to marry her if she helps him, and her provision of magic herbs and drugs and her chanting of magic spells to help him prevail in the impossible tasks set by her father. And when Ovid finally reaches the rejuvenation of Jason's father, the metamorphosis that justifies including Jason and Medea in the *Metamorphoses*, he breaks with most prior narrative tradition by bringing her "skillful" potion creation to the page: her preparations for invoking the full moon, her page-long detailed address to Hecate, her receiving in return a chariot drawn by winged dragons, and her nine-day and -night passage passage through the Hellenic world gathering herbs, roots, and waters. Then begins the concocting and decocting of newly sacrificed black-fleeced sheep's blood, wine, and warm milk to the sound of her spells and prayers to earth and underworld spirits. Only then does she begin to treat the aged body of Jason's father, laying him out on a carpet of strewn herbs, fumigating his body with torches of flaming black blood, and boiling up a cauldron (whose recipe is given in endless detail), slitting his throat, draining his blood, and replacing it with the cauldron's rejuvenating juices. Aeson arises young, strong, and unwrinkled from his bed of herbs.

The metamorphosis that Medea works would seem to bring fairy tale happiness here on earth for the now youthful Aeson. But Ovid makes her magic lead directly to tragedy, as she uses her success with Aeson to gull Pelias's daughters to let her treat their father whom Medea hates. Their filial love overcomes their equally filial reluctance, and when they've mortally wounded their father, Medea slits his throat to silence him and then pitches his body into a cauldron of boiling water and ordinary herbs. Thus does her beneficent magic turn malevolent.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* also borrows heavily from Greek poets, anthologies of myths, and the *Ornithogonia* (accounts of men transformed into birds) by the Greek author Boios. He may also have used stories by Nicander of Colophon, and he undoubtedly consulted some of the many earlier books that were similarly entitled *Metamorphoses* that we now know only because their titles were mentioned in other authors' works.

Modern readers of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are often surprised, even repelled, by his evident comfort with gory physical encounters: horrifying dismemberment (Pentheus's mother tears him to bits in a Bacchic frenzy), violent infanticide (Athamas smashes the head of his baby Learchus against a rock; Procne cooks and serves her child to its father), and patricide (Pelias's daughters' hack him to death). Human encounters with animals are equally hideous: the Calydonian boar gores Ancaeus so surgically effectively that his organs slip out and trail along the ground. Slaughter is prominent from Book I onward. In Book XII the Battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs lasts for nine pages, during which Ovid explores killing by puncturing, gouging, slicing, tearing, and smashing:

> The broad dome of [Phaeocomes's] skull was shattered, and soft brain matter oozed out through his mouth, through the hollows of his nostrils and his eyes and ears, just as clotted milk trickles through the woven oak twigs of a basket or as the thick liquid, under the sieve's pressure, oozes through the close hole of the mesh.

A second estranging aspect of Ovid's stories involves sexual desire. Sexual encounters typically begin with priapic pursuit, with passion-inflamed male suitors chasing down and ravishing beautiful girls. Apollo chases Daphne; Jupiter pursues Io as well as Diana's nymph Callisto, and – as a bull – mounts Agenon's daughter. Apollo, Neptune, Mercury, and Pluto engage in sexual assaults, setting an example that demigods and humans follow with brutal enthusiasm.

Women's lust provides the second largest category in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. However, only a handful of women (Echo, Naiad, Byblis, and Myrrha) run after cruelly unattainable men (the self-absorbed Narcissus, the disinterested Hermaphrodite, the repelling brother Caunus, and the criminally forbidden father Cinyras). Violent sexual pursuit in the *Metamorphoses* privileges men.

Grief is as mortally dangerous as lust but dangerous for the sufferer: Hylonome falls on the spear that killed her beloved Cyllarus in the battle of the Lapiths and Centaurs. Dido falls on a sword when Aeneas departs without her. Redressing the gender imbalance so evident in the

achievement of heterosexual erotic desire, Ovid introduces accounts of passionate homosexual devotion as well as a host of aberrant encounters that end in death, grief, or transformation.

In the hundreds of brief narratives in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, human experience in this world is not once valorized, validated, or crowned with earthly happiness. Instead of explaining the world, individual tales describe men's and women's encounters with mythic figures that lead to suffering and death. Ovid's version of human experience both implies and teaches the fundamental importance of avoiding intersections with the other-worldly and the supernatural. Their magic powers more often than not pose a mortal threat to human happiness, even to an individual's survival.

Although seemingly magical shapeshifting defines Ovid's stories, these transformations provide compelling evidence for the gods' and goddesses' unquestioned and unquestionable dominion over earthly creatures. If earthlings achieve happiness, it is a rare condition, attained *despite* the gods and not *because of* their active intervention. A remarkably non-, un-, or even anti-fairy tale quality pervades Ovid's brief mythic narratives, something that is even truer of his longer ones. His stories about Jason and Medea, Byblis and Caunus, Myrra and Cinyras, Alcyon and Ceyx, and the Lapiths and the Centaurs are bleak narratives of misery that end either with a violent and gory death or with dissolution of the physical body and its transformation into eternal lament.

Individual stories in the *Metamorphoses* display motifs, episodes, and narrative images that endured for centuries:

1. a chained princess ultimately rescued from a dragon (Hesione and Hercules),
2. three impossible tasks (Hercules and the princess Deianira),
3. magic herbs (Circe and Medea),
4. a cannibalistic giant (Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*),
5. Circe, a powerful manipulator of magic and caster of spells (the *Odyssey*),
6. two stepmothers-turned-old-women, Juno and Pallasa, and
7. chariots pulled by a dragon, a lion, or a swan skimming through the air.

The first five of these motifs from familiar Greek mythology or from Ovid's Latin compendium reappear in the Middle Ages, are integrated into chivalric romances, and slip smoothly into fairy tales from the Italian Renaissance onward. The last two gain prominence only in early modern and modern fairy tales, that is, with the rebirth of the classics and translations of Greek and Latin writings into Italian and other

vernaculars in the later 1500s.[8] What is significant, however, is that the ethic of the ancient Greek or Roman tales in which these motifs appear is one that neither valorizes nor seeks to realize earthly well-being and happiness for their human protagonists. The Ovidian ethic is diametrically opposed to that of the happy human endings celebrated in numberless tales from the early modern period onward.

Ovid reputedly boasted that his *Metamorphoses* would carry his name through the ages. Many now-forgotten poets have comforted themselves with such a belief, but Ovid was right. In the Middle Ages he was the most popular of the Latin poets. Schoolboys used his Latin verse as a grammar school and university model for their writing. In France literate adults read the French *Ovide moralisé*, which in 1340 was Christianized and translated into Latin as *Ovidius Moralizatus*, after which schoolboys and university students were able to study Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as religiously acceptable assigned Latin readings. So important was the rewritten *Metamorphoses* that French writers could refer to *Ovidius moralizatus* as *La Bible des poetes*. From the twelfth-century writings of Chrétien de Troyes and Gottfried von Strassburg through the pan-European thirteenth-century *Alexander Book* and the fourteenth-century *Amorosa Visione* of Boccaccio, medieval authors took Ovid's stories and his transformative magic into their own works. In Italy Boccaccio rediscovered Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in its pre-Christianized Latin form, and reintroduced the Latin Ovid to European readers.

By the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, the *Metamorphoses*'s reach extended beyond French and Latin. By then its many incarnations had also been translated into German, English, Italian, Spanish, Czech, and Polish and had been distributed far and wide in copies printed in the thousands. Fifteenth-, sixteenth-, and seventeenth-century printed editions of the *Metamorphoses*, both in Latin and in European vernaculars, flowed from print centers in Venice, Lyons, Antwerp, London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Leipzig, as well as from small provincial presses like those in Parma, Verona, Pineroli, and Florence in Italy or in Rostock in the northern Germanies. All over Europe wherever there were affluent and leisured readers eager for stories to pass leisure hours, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were available on booksellers' shelves in a language that Hans and his wife, Anne and her husband, or Pietro and all his kin could read and understand. In terms of its long-term influence, the general

[8] Baucis and Philemon's tale is the exact inverse of the Grimms' morality tale, No. 19 "The Fisher and His Wife."

availability of Ovidian imagery would prove to be crucial for the contents of early modern brief narratives of magic.

The Golden Ass of Apuleius

The life of Lucius Apuleius (c123 CE–date of death uncertain) exemplifies the Roman Empire's unifying effect on the Mediterranean world. His mother and his well-off father, a provincial magistrate, lived in Madauros (the Mdaourouch of present-day Algeria) in the Roman province of Numidia. Supported by a small inheritance, Apuleius began his studies in Carthage, continued in Athens and Rome where he immersed himself in rhetoric, later becoming a successful lawyer.

At 33 Apuleius was in Oea, a town on the shore of the Gulf of Sirta in today's Libya, visiting an old friend from his student days, when he fell ill. Nursed back to health by his friend, he became acquainted with his friend's attractive, wealthy, and widowed mother. Engaged at the time to an in-law, she scandalized her family by switching her affection, and her fortune, to the younger Apuleius. The family retaliated with a lawsuit, charging Apuleius with using magic to alienate her affections. The trial resulted not only in Apuleius's vindication, but also in his publication of an apologia, *Pro se de magia*.

Apuleius returned to Carthage sometime around 161 CE, enjoying public renown as a poet, philosopher, and rhetorician, and also becoming the chief priest of Numidia. Two statues were erected in his honor: one in Carthage and the other in the town of his birth, Madauros.

Apuleius's crudely erotic stories, entitled *The Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius*, were united within a fictive first-person frametale whose narrator's comic sufferings began when a servant girl, meaning to transform him into an owl, mistakenly turned him into an ass (*asinus*). Passed from one owner to another, the frametale man-turned-into-an-ass retained his human intellect, hearing stories and seeing events that he "recorded" when he regained human shape.

The precise date of Apuleius's composition remains unknown. Two hundred or so years later, the church father St Augustine, disapproving of Apuleius's book, transmitted to the modern world a less lofty and more popular title, *The Golden Ass*. Augustine, born in Apuleius's home town, had grown up there and, as a schoolboy, probably saw the statues that celebrated Apuleius both in Medauros and in Carthage where Augustine, like Apuleius, studied at university.

Stories from Lucius of Samosata's *Lucius, or The Ass* are recycled in the *Golden Ass*: in one, a harridan innkeeper plagues and then kills a man

called Socrates; in another a corpse is guarded against gods who take on the shape of mice and a weasel to attack it. There are eunuch priests who trick the gullible with fake predictions, and two classic stories of clever adultery that Boccaccio took straight into the *Decameron* 1200 years later (VII. 2 and V.10). Amid these scabrous stories, like a diamond on a dunghill, sits the brilliantly conceived "Cupid and Psyche." Its length places it firmly within the novella genre, but it has the overall plot trajectory of a restoration fairy tale, whose royally-born heroine is expelled from royal estate, suffers tasks and trials, and at the conclusion, marries royalty and is restored to an elevated position. Much of the tale's declared magic is fabricated by Psyche's sisters; the rest is borrowed from the mythic qualities attributed to antique divinities.[9]

Before Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche" there is neither allusion to nor mention of any such story in Greek or Roman tradition. Greek mythology credits Cupid's well-aimed arrows for other irrational loves, such as Apollo's for Daphne and Pluto's for Proserpine, but is silent on the subject of Cupid's love for Psyche and hers for him. There are individual similarities between Apuleius's tale and its predecessors, but when all of the differences in his tale are put together, it is plain that "Cupid and Psyche" represents a new kind of story. Gender antagonisms in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had principally involved girls' and women's flights from pursuing males. In "Cupid and Psyche," however, the issues are more complex. Venus becomes jealous of Psyche when her worshipers begin adoring Psyche's beauty and neglecting Venus's temples. Psyche's family is described in psychological terms that are characteristic of novels, while the details of the marriages of Psyche's sisters and of the four impossible tasks with which Venus plagues her, both of which survive in the expanded fairyland fictions composed by late seventeenth-century *conteuses* like Mlle Lhéritier and Mme d'Aulnoy, amplify the tale's tensions. In introducing the plot element that Psyche's child would be born divine if she kept the secret of her husband's identity, but mortal if she divulged it, Apuleius links curiosity to speech and consequent punishment, a concept unfamiliar in secular literature before the turn of the millennium. (The Greek Pandora myth had blamed the titular heroine for her curiosity, but speech played no role.) Classically Greek in feeling (recalling Medea's tricking the daughters of Pelias) is the cleverly murderous revenge that Psyche takes on her sisters, each of

[9] Cupid's divinity in *The Golden Ass* is replaced by a beast- or monster-lover's royalty in later iterations of this plot.

whom she induces to throw herself over a cliff to a bloody death on the rocks below. The psychological drama of Psyche's human isolation (when both Ceres and Juno refuse to help her) culminates in Jupiter's pronouncing her immortal.

"Cupid and Psyche" is the longest tale in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, one sixth of the entire text. Told by a crone hired by kidnappers to guard a terrified girl abducted from her own wedding ceremony, "Cupid and Psyche" is a love story with a happy ending. In particular, its plot plays out between an earthling (Psyche) and a divinity (Cupid), who are themselves caught within a web of jealousies and power plays between parallel worlds, that of the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus and of humans on earth, with the story's happy resolution brought about by supernatural intervention. It is the intervention of divinities into human lives that counts as magic in Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche" and that provides a model for fairy interventions into human lives in fairyland fictions and a template for fairy godmothers in fairy tales.

To modern eyes, the ending of "Cupid and Psyche" should foretell an equally happy conclusion for the unhappy frametale captive to whom the tale is told. But her fate is alas a miserable one: she falls victim to an old admirer who kills her husband and whose eyes she tears out before falling on her husband's sword in a miserably magicless conclusion.

Apuleius's story furnishes the basic narrative materials for one of Europe's most enduringly popular fairy tales, "Beauty and the Beast." But it is important to realize that for Apuleius, the beastliness of the groom was purely psychological in its origin and in the maintenance of the illusion of a repulsive appearance: the Apollonian oracle at Delphi, enigmatic as always, prophesied Psyche's eventual marriage not to a mortal son-in-law but to "a dire mischief, viperous and fierce" in the words of Robert Graves's translation (Apuleius, 1951: 100). It is Psyche's two sisters who persuade her that she had married a monstrous serpent, whose true identity, they say, is hidden from her by the nighttime darkness that Cupid forbids Psyche to illuminate. Central to understanding Apuleius's story is recognizing two profound differences between it and tales of the "Beauty and the Beast" type: Psyche's beloved is never a beast who needs to be magically transformed into a handsome prince, and her love is never needed to redeem him from an enthralling magic. Instead, in Apuleius's novella, Psyche's love for Cupid is reinforced by the seductively smooth body of the man whose arms embrace her nightly. She never confronts, and is never required to love, a visible monster, as do the heroines of modern "Beauty and the Beast" tales.

A number of motifs that ultimately become a standard part of the modern fairy tale repertoire form part of Apuleius's collection of tales: a magic salve that turns Lucius into an animal; multiple impossible tasks; transformations by a witch of people into animals (a beaver, a frog, and a ram respectively); the magic revival of a corpse; and taletelling as therapy for a suffering frametale girl, which recurs in Basile's *Tale of Tales*. More important, however, is the fact that "Cupid and Psyche" is a rare story from antiquity that rewards a heroine's sufferings with a wedding to her beloved. The wedding does not take place on earth, it is true, and neither does the tale's happily-ever-after. Along with "The Shipwrecked Sailor," "Cupid and Psyche" is one of the rare short narratives from the ancient world that valorizes human happiness, that does not allow a supernatural to destroy a human protagonist's happiness, and that has a happy ending ... in heaven.

The actual practice of magic remains generally obscure in brief narratives of magic in the ancient world. The ink in which Egyptian magic formulas are written may be dissolved in beer and drunk to gain powers, but that abbreviated account together with Ovid's lengthy recital of Medea's magical preparations are a rarity among the classic world's declarations that magic has taken place. Magic itself remains undetailed in "Cupid and Psyche," despite Apuleius's awareness of magic practices like catoptric magic (performing magic with mirrors), hydromancy, divination, and sacrifices (Apuleius, 1997: 2: 57–8, 127, 153) and despite the misdeeds of the sorceress Meroe written into Book I of the *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius's subsequent humor at maladroit magicianship's turning Lucius into a donkey in its frametale. The fact that only Ovid puts the practice of magic on the page grabs our attention, precisely because tales of magic in the ancient world deal with the effects of magic or with magic itself as an *effect* of suprahuman and supernatural powers rather than with the actual practice of magic.

3
Jewish Magic Tales

This chapter's explorations of Jewish magic tales rest on Hebrew manuscript books that are traceable to specific geographic locations or particular historical eras, and sometimes to both. Biblical histories from the Torah, the first five books of the canonical Bible, underlay centuries of Jewish tellings of magic tales and also provided plot outlines or characters for later expansions of those tales. A close consideration of Moses' supernaturally powerful exploits as they exist in the Torah opens the chapter, and is followed by an examination of magic tales from the Babylonian exile, the period of revolts against Roman authority, and ancient and medieval diasporic narratives.

The literature of Jewish magic tales was slow to emerge as a distinct corpus. Even the pioneering scholar S.D. Goitein set aside magic-related materials from the rich trove of manuscript sources in the Cairo Genizah, leaving it for twenty-first century scholars to accept the problematic presence of evident belief in, practice of, and tales about magic within some of the myriad documents produced in the course of Jewish history. Much medieval source material became available to those who could not read Hebrew from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century translations into western European languages, such as the 1916 *Der Born Judas: Legenden, Märchen und Erzählungen* by Micha Joseph Bin-Gorion (1865–1921) and the 1924 *Exempla of the rabbis; being a collection of exempla, apologues, and tales culled from Hebrew manuscripts and rare Hebrew books* by Moses Gaster (1856–1939).

Dating an individual narrative within the Jewish tradition of magic tales can be difficult for lay readers, since popular anthologies often designate tales whose tellings date from the 1700s and 1800s, for instance, as "medieval." With respect to storytelling, I link the chronological term "medieval" to pre-print production. The printing press's first products, in

the 1450s and 1460s consisted chiefly of higher literatures, but by 1470 cheap print products began to spread stories among a broader population and by 1500 popular publishing was fully in place. In this chapter, the period between 1470 and 1500 is taken as the point at which European printing presses began to expand storytelling, and economic change in urban centers began to significantly alter the social contexts within which urban storytelling, whether religious or secular, took place.

The earliest extant Hebrew magic tales are to be found in the first five books of the Bible (the Torah), as well as in the Bible as a whole (the Tanakh) and in the books of the Apocrypha. New magic tales were added in the period of the Second Temple (530 BCE–70 CE), by the end of which the Jewish population of the eastern Mediterranean had largely joined other Jews in their centuries-old and ever growing diaspora. In the Rabbinic period, new tales were composed to suit the fundamentally differing life experiences of Jews in the diaspora; in the Geonic and medieval periods, many tales survived from earlier periods.

The tale choices and dating of Eli Yassif in *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (1999) have largely determined the tales I discuss here. Although Yassif was more concerned with genre than with a historical approach to the tales' creation, his chronological orderings, which are based on the documents from which he excerpted each tale he discusses, are foundational for this chapter. I have augmented the tales in *The Hebrew Folktale* with additional datable narratives that illuminate changes in magic's nature, purpose, and relationship to human beings in Jewish magic tales.

It is well known that individual tales change over time, but Yassif's dating demonstrates that the *kinds* of tales told shift over time in accordance with changes in the life experiences of the stories' tellers and listeners. Thus, each telling or writing of a particular tale may be considered unique, since each writer or teller writes or speaks within a specific environment that differs, if only microscopically, from geographically neighboring or historically preceding milieus. Changes might be barely perceptible, but each version of a given tale produces a slightly different story, distinctive in its valuation of characters, its formation of plot, its conceptualization of outcomes, and the rhetorical or intonational emphasis on individual story parts. Stories grouped together by geographical and historical provenance proffer hints about their authors' and their tellers' attitudes toward tale protagonists' relationship to magic along with the role of magic itself. As a result, comparisons between historically differing groups of Jewish magic tales reveal significant changes in the role played by narrative magic over time.

Jewish magic tales form a part, albeit small, of Judaism's fundamental text, the Torah. Minutely studied by generation after generation, this written document has been religiously parsed, ethically interpreted, and narratively expanded by scores of Jewish sages. As a means of communicating deep truths, stories of all kinds have found their way into homiletics as well as into legal discourse. Within this vast body of literature, some tales include supernatural characters and physically inexplicable events, such as transformations, physical disappearances, revivals from death, miraculous births, and overpowerings of humans by demons. The way in which such stories were recounted shows how their authors or the characters within their stories understood magic; for them story elements that overturned the physical laws of nature or inverted the normal course of events within their community were inexplicable and were therefore understood as having emanated from divine power expressed on earth or from the malevolent, malicious powers of demonic antagonists. Magic was defined in terms of community: what benefited Jews was divine intervention; what caused them suffering was the magic of their (demonic or human) antagonists. The inexplicable itself, the magic, was much the same in both cases.

In theoretical terms, magic exists uncomfortably within monotheism, which requires a single being, a supreme power, an only god, who wields all power. Yet, the Tanakh includes accounts of ongoing conflict between the God of the Israelites and local deities worshiped by Gentiles. Consequently, Jewish characters' encounters with "magic" distinct from that supreme deity needed to be reframed.[1]

A story's survival lies in the province of cultural studies: those tales that find acceptance are repeated from one generation to the next; those that don't, fall out of circulation. I will explore the narrative dynamics of and attitudes toward magic in Jewish magic tales from the ancient world to the end of the Middle Ages. (The dynamics of narrative circulation [spoken or written] is essentially a folkloristic question and forms no part of the following discussion.[2]) Jewish magic tales almost never incorporate magic practices like those described by Joshua

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[1] For a nuanced discussion of ancient Jewish magic's coexisting with a monotheistic worldview, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic. A History* (2008: 51–69).

[2] See Yassif's 1999 *Hebrew Folktale*, for a sustained inquiry into relationships between oral folktale and Hebrew texts. Yassif "highlight[s] the thematic continuity and intertextuality of the Hebrew folktale traditions (xiii), with an "orientation [that] is by no means historical, but generic" (xix) in contrast to the direction I take using the same material.

Trachtenberg in *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (1939), Gideon Bohak in *Ancient Jewish Magic. A History* (2008), Peter Schäfer in "Jewish Magic Tales in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages" (1990), or in the minutely detailed instructions involved in handbooks of magical practices. In this respect, the magic in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim magic tales is similar.

Magic in the Torah: Moses the magician

Beyond the extraordinary process of the world's creation and the presence of giants, demons, and competing gods like Baal, there is, in the Torah, a man with mighty powers whom Christians know as Moses and Muslims as Musa. In the Torah he is Moshe, an 80-year-old magician.[3] Instructed by YHWH himself, he learns to throw his staff to the ground so that it turns into a snake, and afterward to seize it by the tail so that it "became a staff in his fist" (Exodus 4:2–4[4]). YHWH further teaches Moshe how to turn his hand a diseased white, like snow, and back to normal flesh again (4:6–7), as well as to change the Nile's water into blood (4:9). The second book of the Torah tells Moshe that he will be "a god" to his brother Aharon (4:16), holding "the staff of God in his hand" (4:20), and that YHWH will make him "as a god for Pharaoh" (7:2).

With the "portents" (Exod. 4:21) put at his disposal by YHWH, Moshe is to respond to Pharaoh's demand for a "portent" by telling Aharon to throw down his staff and let it become a serpent (7:9), a piece of magic that "the magicians of Egypt" easily match (7:112) but quickly lose, as "Aharon's staff swallowed up their staffs" (7:12). After Moshe – through Aharon – has all the water in Egypt changed into blood and the entire territory of Egypt swarm with frogs, the limitations of Pharaoh's magicians become apparent: they can perform the same feats, but cannot *un*do them, as can Moshe (7:19–8:11). When Moshe – through Aharon – turns "all of the dust of the ground [into] gnats throughout all the land

[3] In *Ancient Jewish Magic*, Bohak distinguishes between holy men with "innate powers" and "readily available paraphernalia" to perform magic to serve "some of the needs of the wider population" and magicians with an "acquired body of technical knowledge" to serve "their clients' needs" (2008: 27). These distinctions fit later instances of biblical and rabbinic magic, but the biblical Moses already amalgamates the attributes and intentions of Holy men and magicians, as Bohak describes them.

[4] All quotations from the Torah are taken from *The Five Books of Moses*, trans. Everett Fox (1995).

of Egypt" (8:13–14), Pharaoh's helpless magicians recognize this work as "the finger of God" (8:15) and do nothing when YHWH himself sends heavy insect swarms throughout all the land of Egypt (8:20). Moshe is to announce a pestilential attack on the Egyptians' livestock (9:1–6), Moshe and Aharon are to hurl soot into the air that will settle "on man and on beast . . . [and] become boils sprouting into blisters, throughout all the land of Egypt, afflicting even Pharaoh's magicians" (9:8–11). Moshe alone is to announce a mortally destructive hail (9:13), whose fiery realization commands pharaonic attention:

> YHWH said to Moshe: Stretch out your hand over the heavens: Let there be hail throughout all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on all the plants of the field, throughout the land of Egypt! Moshe stretched out his staff over the heavens, and YHWH gave forth thunder-sounds and hail, and fire went toward the earth, and YHWH caused hail to rain down upon the land of Egypt. There was hail and a fire taking-hold-of-itself amidst the hail, exceedingly heavy, the like of which had never been throughout all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. The hail struck, throughout all the land of Egypt, all that was in the field, from man to beast; all the plants of the field the hail struck, and all the trees of the field it broke down. (Exod. 9:22–25)

Moshe calls off the thunder, hail, and rain at Pharaoh's request (9:33), but he and Aharon recount to an unrepentant Pharaoh YHWH's warning that he will send locusts on the morrow (10:4). Moshe "stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt"[5] (10:13) to bring this threat about, which YHWH eventually "reversed" with "an exceedingly strong sea wind" (10:19). Up to this point, the enabling and the immediate agency for each wonder is clearly identified as YHWH's. But when Moshe's outstretched hand results in covering Egypt with darkness, a momentary lack of textual specificity opens the possibility that it is Moshe's own powers that YHWH directs to be released:

> YHWH said to Moshe: Stretch out your hand over the heavens, and let there be darkness over the land of Egypt; they will feel darkness! Moshe stretched out his hand over the heavens,[6] and there was

[5] Moshe stretches out his staff although YHWH has specifically told him to stretch out his "hand" (Exod. 10:12).

[6] The Jewish Publication Society's 1985 translation of the *Tanakh* reads: "Hold out your arm towards the sky …" (Exod. 10:21).

> gloomy darkness throughout all the land of Egypt, for three days, a man could not see his brother, and a man could not arise from his spot, for three days. (Exod. 10:21–22)

However, it is without Moshe and Aharon (12:29) that YHWH strikes the final blow against Pharaoh, the death of all firstborns both human and animal (11:1–6), and it is YHWH's supernatural daytime column of cloud and nighttime column of fire that leads the way to the place where the Red Sea will form a wall for the Children of Israel on their right and on their left after Moshe stretches out his hand (Exod. 14:21–22).[7]

The Torah, as it became codified from its constituent sources, made it clear to readers that Moshe's magic was not his own, but that it enacted God's will. Each of Moshe's (and Aharon's) magical interventions is told doubly: as a divine instruction and as a deed following therefrom. YHWH tells Moshe to get the Children of Israel on their way, "to hold [his] staff high, stretch [his] hand over the sea and split it, so that the Children of Israel may come through the midst of the sea upon the dry land" (Exod. 14:15). In another text Moshe has clearly raised an objection, for YHWH says, "YHWH will make war for you, and you – *be still!!* [My emphasis.] YHWH said to Moshe: Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the Children of Israel . . ." (Exod. 14:14–15). As YHWH responds to this unrecorded cry from Moshe, we encounter a textual seam.[8] Something

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[7] Note the sequential and multiple deployments of magic as Moshe confronts Pharaoh. In the Tanakh, Elisha demonstrates a similar breadth of magical deployments – parting a river's water by striking it with Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:14), healing the bad waters of a spring (2 Kings 2:21–22), calling forth she-bears who mangled 42 boys who had mocked him (2 Kings 2:24), filling a dry wadi with pools of water (2 Kings 3:16–17), filling empty vessels with oil (2 Kings 4:3–7), an unfruitful womb with a son (2 Kings 4:16–17), and with his own body a dead child with life (2 Kings 4:31–36) – attributed to the word of the Lord being with him (2 Kings 3:12). Note that this is a partial list of Elisha's miraculous/magical achievements, which continue unabated in the following chapters. This multiplicity of supernatural events distinguishes the Moshe and Elisha narratives from other supernatural encounters in the Torah with the magic powers attributed to Elisha seeming to have been designed to surpass those of Moshe. Customarily, as Yassif notes, Biblical legends employ supernatural force only at the decisive moment (1999: 16).

[8] Nineteenth-century textual scholars identified four documentary sources within the Five Books of Moses that ranged in age from 900 to 500 BCE. Whether one subscribes to the view that these documents had definably different authors (Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly) or whether one accepts conceptualizations of the Torah as a later construction, recent scholarship accepts the views that the Torah comprises material from differing sources.

has been deleted. When the magical event takes place, "Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea . . . and made the sea into firm ground." In the middle of this statement come these words: "and YHWH caused the sea to go back with a fierce east wind all night," affirming the entire occurrence with a final assertion: "thus the waters split" (Exod. 14:21). In this manner Moshe's magic powers are presented as a channeling of YHWH's omnipotence. And since it is YHWH's omnipotence that YHWH himself repeatedly asserts in Exodus, it is consistent with those assertions that it be made utterly clear that Moshe is not a rival purveyor of miracles, but a subordinate provider of services that derive from YHWH.[9] The Passover celebration of YHWH's deliverance of the Jewish people from Egyptian oppression in an annual religious ritual reiterates that Moshe's magic be understood within the context of monotheistic power.

A second instance of Moshe's indwelling magic powers, however, is more problematic with respect to monotheism. Perhaps this episode has attracted less general attention, because it has generated no surviving ritual:

> Moshe said to Yehoshua: Choose us men, and go out, make-war upon Amalek! On the morrow I will station myself on top of the hill, with the staff of God in my hand. Yehoshua did as Moshe had said to him, to make-war against Amalek. Now Moshe, Aharon, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it was, whenever Moshe raised his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he set down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Now Moshe's hands are heavy: so they took a stone and placed it under him, and he sat down on it, while Aharon and Hur supported his hands, one on this-side and one on that-side. So his hands remained steadfast, until the sun came in. (Exod. 17:9–12)

It is possible to think of the top of a hill simply as a vantage point from which to observe the battle on the plain below. However, we also

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[9] Indeed, I find that this understanding sheds light on the puzzling Exodus account of God's meeting Moshe on the road and attempting to kill him (Exod. 4:24), which Tzippora averts by circumcising their son. If YHWH's rage resulted from Moshe's not having performed the ritual that would unite his son to the community of Israel, whose identity was so closely tied to recognizing YHWH's pre-eminence, then that rage could be softened by an on-the-spot circumcision. A further part of YHWH's rage may be understood to have arisen from YHWH's having acknowledged a few verses earlier that Moshe will be for Aharon "a god" (4:16). At the very least, this suggests that Moshe will be to Aharon as YHWH is to Moshe.

remember that the gods competing with YHWH abode on hilltops, so that Moses' hilltop positioning associates him with divine powers in competition with YHWH. That possibility is only a dim presence in the battle with the Amalekites, but Moshe's indwelling power to affect the course of battle solely by the up or down position of his hands and arms argues for recognition of Moshe as an independent magician.

The Moses story unfolds within a document that predated the medieval period by nearly two thousand years. And yet, because that document underlay the intellectual and spiritual life of Jews, its texts founded enduring narrative propositions. Primary among them is that ethical magic proceeds only from the Almighty and that divine magic will ultimately overpower demonic magic. In different ways, these propositions, along with narrative corollaries, governed the growing body of Jewish magic tales.

Second Temple period (530 BCE–70 CE)

As mighty Middle Eastern empires contended with one another, Alexander blazed through them all, creating a vast empire that fell apart at his death. At the same time in the West, Rome expanded its control until it governed the far reaches of Europe and the Mediterranean littoral. The period closed with the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the seat of Jewish ritual and legal practice, while the Roman suppression of the Bar Kokhba rebellion two generations later (135 CE) served as a coda.

During the Second Temple period, the Jewish population was divided. Although many had returned from Babylon to Israel after the legal end of the exile (530 BCE), large numbers remained where they had been since their early sixth-century BCE deportation. In addition, a sizeable Greek-speaking Jewish population grew up in Alexandria.

Tales generated and written in the post-Biblical period built up a repertoire in which the Almighty and his angelic assistants often intervened to save individual Jews and to preserve the practice of Judaism. The prerequisite that magic be solely divine entails that its practice not lie within the human province. The apocryphal *Book of Tobit* exemplifies this sense of magic as divinely dispensed. Written late in the Second Temple period (in the second century BCE), the *Book of Tobit* is set some 600 years earlier, during the reigns of Shalmaneser V (727–722 BCE), Sargon II (722–705 BCE), and Sennacherib (704–681 BCE). Never taken into the Masoretic text by Jews or into Protestant translations of the Bible after Luther, the tale of Tobit summarized below comes from *The*

Dead Sea Scrolls Bible, translated into English and published by Martin Abegg, Jr, Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich in 1999.[10]

A devout Jew named Tobit, captive in Ninevah, is discovered burying the Jewish dead. Fearing for his life, he flees with his wife Anna and his son Tobiah. But before forty days have passed, a new king rules, appoints Tobit's nephew his chief of accounts, and Tobit, his wife, and his son return to Ninevah and live in comfort. He apparently continues his practice of burying the Jewish dead.

Subsequently Tobit, not knowing "that there were sparrows on the wall above [him], . . . their fresh droppings fell into [his] eyes and produced white films" that worsen until – despite physicians' efforts to heal him – he is "totally blind" (2:10). For the next four years a kinsman and then his wife support him, and he falls into despair. Positioning his suffering within a larger context of Jews' not having kept his commandments, Tobit begs the Lord to "command his life to be taken from [him]" (3:6). The same day in far-distant Media, a young woman named Sarah is reproached by her father's maidservants for having brought death to seven men, each of whom "Asmodeus the evil spirit slew" on the wedding night (3:8). Despairing, she wishes to hang herself, but reconsiders because her aged father would die in grief (3:10), and so she begs the Lord to "[c]ommand that [she] be released from the earth, and that [she] no more hear condemnation" (2:13). "At the same time Tobit returned from the courtyard to his house, Sarah the daughter of Raguel came down from her upper room" (3:17).

After adjuring his son Tobiah to live righteously, Tobit tells him about money he had placed with a man in Media. Tobiah encounters a man claiming to be a kinsman named Azariah (5:13), who comforts Tobiah's mother Anna. As they travel to Media together, he says, "a good angel will go with him and shall prosper his journey and he shall return in good health again" (5:22).

Accompanied by a dog, Tobiah and the angel Raphael set out, and when Tobias bathes his feet in the waters of the Tigris, "a large fish leaped up from the water to swallow the young man's foot" (Tobit 6:3). The angel instructs him to seize the fish, to remove its gall, heart, and liver to keep for medicine (6:5), because "if you burn them before a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, then every

[10] Readers familiar with the Book of Tobit in the Christian Apocrypha will note many differences in language, style and attitudes towards magic.

> affliction will depart . . . And the gall is to be used to anoint a person's eyes on which white scales have appeared; blow on them, on the white scales, and they will be healed" (6:8–9).
>
> Arriving in Media the angel, now called Raphael by the narrator, informs Tobiah about his right as a relative to marry the "wise, strong, and very beautiful" Sarah (Tobit 6:10–12), assuring him that placing the fish's liver and heart on the ashes of smoking incense will drive off the husband-killing demon (6:17–18). The marriage is duly contracted (7:1–13) – and Raphael having retrieved the money from Gabael – the wedding is carried out. Then Tobiah, Sarah, the angel Raphael, and their entourage return to Tobit and Anna. Tobiah cures Tobit's blindness eyes by blowing the fish gall into his eyes and peeling off the white scales. (11:11–14)

The tale ends with an explanatory coda, which we may understand as its author's effort to corral the magic so evidently practiced and to attribute it to YHWH. The angel Raphael affirms his status as an angel by claiming that his eating the fish Tobias had caught was "a vision" (since it was well known that angels needed no earthly sustenance), reveals to Tobit (and to the tale's reader or hearers) that God had sent him, that he was now "ascending to him who sent me," and that Tobit should "[w]rite down everything that has happened" (12:18–20).

Tobias, Anna, and Tobiah do not take the angel Raphael's appearance among them for granted, but "marvel how the angel of the *** had appeared to them" (12:22). In Tobit's lengthy prayer, which comprises Chapter 13, the Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts of the Tobit tale posit reciprocity between people's behavior and God's marvellous response: if Jews acknowledge God and live righteously, then the King of heaven will succor them and have mercy on Jerusalem, "which will be built as an eternal city" (13:16). At this point the tale of Tobit confers extravagantly imaginative qualities on the future Jerusalem: it will have gates of beryl and sapphire, walls of precious stones, towers of gold, streets "paved with ruby and the stone of Ophir," and the houses themselves will speak, praising and blessing God and his name (13:16–18).

The Book of Tobit, the principal source of information for Jewish exorcistic fumigation, provides a rare glimpse into Second Temple period magic practices, although it arrogates all such practices to the divine.[11]

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[11] Bohak remarks on the absence of incantations from Tobias's fumigations, pointing out that in the story it is the repellent smell of the burning materials that drive off the demon (2008: 88–94, here 92).

It is Raphael, one of God's seven attendant angels, who instructs Tobiah in the curative use of fish gall. And to exorcise the powerful demon Asmodeus (a *fallen* angel) from the beautiful Sarah, it is another angel, again Raphael, who instructs the human Tobiah in the process of fumigation.

Written sometime around 100 BCE, when the dispersal of Israel's population was a long established phenomenon, Tobit prophesies on his deathbed, "All our kinfolk who live in the land of Israel will be scattered and will go into captivity from the good land" (14:4). The author, writing what he saw, described a desolate land and a ruined Jerusalem foreseen by an old man in Ninevah.

Another Second Temple period tale that incorporates magical effects is the Book of Daniel.[12] Composed in the second century BCE, it also refers its events back to an early Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar II (605–562 BCE), who elevates a worthy Jew to high position in royal service:

> Daniel, chosen from among young men of royal or noble descent and for perfection of body and mind (Daniel 1:3–4), is educated in the literature and language of the Chaldeans, his insight and judgment in these matters eventually proving him to be "ten times better than all the magicians and exorcists throughout the realm" (1:20).
>
> When Nebuchadnezzar wishes to have a dream interpreted, he requires that the interpreter have prior knowledge of his dream and that he recount the dream accurately as a token of his insight. Chaldean sages demur because "there is no one who can tell it to the king except the gods whose abode is not among mortals" (2:11). When Daniel's god discloses Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel, he praises God's omniscience and omnipotence, intervenes to save Nebuchadnezzar's wise men from execution (for not being able to recount the dream), and interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream as prophesying what is to be at the end of this age (2:28). Nebuchadnezzar prostrates himself, worships Daniel (2:46), and raises him and his three Judean companions to high office.

The favor bestowed on Daniel and his companions continues only as long as Nebuchadnezzar's benign mood, and when the Judeans refuse

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[12] Cited texts are taken from *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim* (1985).

to prostrate themselves before a gold image that Nebuchadnezzar raises, the monarch orders Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego [the Babylonian names for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah] thrown into a blazing furnace (Daniel 3:19–20), where the magically miraculous effects of their god's protection preserve all four from fiery death:

> Even at "seven times its usual heat" (3:19) the oven cannot so much as singe their garments, and they emerge unscathed (3:27). Acknowledging that divine power saved them, Nebuchadnezzar condemns anyone who blasphemes the Jews' god to forfeiture and death. (3:28–29)
>
> The next time Daniel is called to interpret a royal dream, he discloses that Nebuchadnezzar will be deposed until he learns "that the Most High is sovereign over the realm of man, and He gives it to whom He wishes" (4:22). Nebuchadnezzar is immediately "banished from the society of men and ate grass like oxen; his body was drenched by the dew of heaven, until his hair grew long like goats' hair and his nails like eagles' talons" (4:33)[13] and his son Belshazzar ascends the throne.

Daniel's story continues at Belshazzar's feast with a third set of tasks and trials that begin with mystic words written by a disembodied hand on the wall as irreverent concubines and courtesans drink from sanctified gold vessels from the Jerusalem temple. Daniel's interpretation (the words foretell the numbered days of Belshazzar's kingdom) is borne out that very night when Belshazzar is slain and replaced by Darius the Mede. Although Darius honors Daniel, his ministers and satraps conspire to bring him down by decreeing that anyone who petitions any god or man other than the king be thrown to the lions (6:8):

> Darius reluctantly commits Daniel to the lions, but is relieved to find him unharmed in the morning. Then "those men who had slandered Daniel were brought, and together with their children and wives, were thrown into the lions' den. They had hardly reached the bottom of the den when the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones" (6:25), after which Darius decrees "that throughout my royal domain men must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel." (6:28)

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[13] This passage marks an early point, if not the point of origin, of the motif of the Wild Man in folk narrative.

In the Book of Daniel, supernatural creatures save Daniel, preserve Jewish practice, and exalt the Jewish people. The angel Gabriel, before whom Daniel falls "prostrate" (Daniel 8:17), interprets Daniel's vision as "what will happen when wrath is at an end" (8:19). Later Gabriel "was sent forth in flight" (9:21); Daniel encounters a man whose face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and legs had the color of burnished bronze, and the sound of his speech was like "the noise of a multitude" (10:6), and who brings a vision of the political future,[14] at the close of which the archangel Michael is predicted to deliver the Jews (12:1).

Like Tobias, Daniel is magically aided by divine force, but unlike Tobias, Daniel's divine helper remains invisible, his invisibility centering attention on Daniel's perfections, which include his unwavering loyalty to the divine power, even though Daniel's personal powers at the courts of Belshazzar and Darius may be understood to derive from his successful studies of the literature and language of Chaldean magicians. Daniel does not fit into the category of a magic-wielding Jew whose powers derive solely from personal piety or from rigorous study of Jewish holy books. This understanding of Daniel is confirmed by comparison with Tobit, whose extreme piety provoked persecution, but not the means of redressing it.

The third, and final set of tales from the Second Temple period, concern military exploits. The First Book of Maccabees, written in Hebrew in a now lost text, has come down to the modern world in its Greek translation. Not a Jewish religious text, it is valued for its factually presented and textually documented account of the long wars led by Judas Maccabaeus against Israel's oppressors.[15] Judas often reminds the Israelites under his command of past divine interventions, such as the parting of the Red Sea, but the victories he wins result not from divine intervention but from canny strategy and courageous soldiers.

The Second Book of Maccabees, composed originally in Greek, takes a different tack altogether. Its author announces it as an abridgment of Jason of Cyrene's five books about the story (2 Maccabees 2:19), easier to read and more entertaining (2:25). More importantly, he introduces explicit magic. In Chapter 3, the Syrian king's chief minister Heliodorus arrives at the Jerusalem temple intent on removing the deposits of gold

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[14] A detailed and retrospective prediction.

[15] For 1 and 2 Maccabees I have used *The New English Bible with Apocrypha* (1970).

and silver held there in trust for widows and orphans, a move that triggers immediate supernatural opposition:

> "…the Ruler of spirits and of all powers produc[ing] a mighty apparition" (2 Maccabees 3:24), . . . a splendidly caparisoned horse, which together with its golden-armored rider, rears up and attacks him with its hooves, while two more men scourge him. A deep darkness suddenly falls, and Heliodorus's men carry him away in a litter, "publicly compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of God." (3:28)

That this event is miraculous is attested in the following text and is given further weight by the reappearance of the same two splendidly dressed and supernaturally strong young men who so recently scourged Heliodorus (2 Maccabees 3:33–34). At the point at which Antiochus invades Egypt for a second time, the author of the Second Book of Maccabees embroiders the narratives with apparitions of military engagements in the sky over Jerusalem that last "for nearly forty days" (5:2–3).

Daniel's tale depicts the "rescue of an imperiled community and the supernatural punishment of the one who harms the Jewish people" (Yassif, 1999: 40). It might be argued that the author of the Second Book of Maccabees uses a supernatural vanquishing of Heliodorus from the temple treasury to make the same point, with the ensuing illusion of military charges and countercharges in the night sky reinforcing this higher purpose by imaginatively projecting earthly events onto a heavenly screen. Surpassing any illusionism effected by an earthly magician, the author of the Second Book of Maccabees pens magic onto the skies, creating a spectacle that guarantees divine support and promises future intervention. This kind of magical apparition, even if merely literary, communicates the optimism of a moment of military triumph.

Gideon Bohak has considered the paucity of evidence for magic practice in the Second Temple period, including the "total lack of evidence" of Jewish amulets (2008: 114–15). He suggests that more evidence may emerge from as-yet-undiscovered documents, but concludes, problematically in my view, that the absence of documents suggests that magical knowledge was transmitted orally rather than in writing in this period. Considering the Tobit, Daniel, and Maccabees magic tales against the historical background of their second and first century BCE composition suggests a different possibility. These tales' general trajectory is upward; their mood is optimistic; a can-do sense pervades the texts; their protagonists seem to feel they can and will triumph against all odds. With such confidence the need to turn to magic would naturally

diminish, and could well have contributed to the paucity of evidence for magic practices in the Second Temple period.[16]

By the end of the Second Temple period, Jews from Palestine had moved throughout the Roman Empire as well as into Asia Minor and the Near East. Dating this diasporic movement is difficult, but Erich Gruen estimates that "Jews abroad far outnumbered those living in Palestine – and had done so for many generations" (2002: 3). As repeatedly emerges from his 2002 study *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Jewish diasporic populations largely accommodated to or assimilated into the surroundings into and within which they had voluntarily situated themselves.

The Rabbinic period (70–632 CE)

The Maccabees' earlier military victories were not predictive for the future. After Jewish insurrection in Palestine in the late 60s CE and the destruction of the Second Temple in 78 CE, the great majority of Palestine's Jewish population also became diasporic, as Roman governors in Palestine dispersed them to distant parts of the Empire. The nation of Israel no longer existed in political terms, its destruction effectively invalidating Jewish magic tales in which God protected and fostered it.

During the Rabbinic period that followed the destruction of the Second Temple, authors of Jewish magic tales explored new narrative materials and acknowledged that opponents of the Jews wielded magic just as had the Biblical Moses. On many occasions magic tales of the Rabbinic period seem to adopt a near-polytheistic view of YHWH as one among many divinities competing for supremacy, a vision occasionally expressed in the Torah and by later prophets.

The Jewish community's dispersal over huge distances means that tales composed by individual rabbis in this period took shape within specific cultural milieus that differed markedly from one another. This cultural heterogeneity entailed recurrent inconsistencies in worldviews. One tale might claim that magic proceeded solely from the Lord, while another might acknowledge non-Jewish divinity-derived magic, while counterbalancing that acknowledgement by defining non-Jewish magic as inferior in strength and effect.

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[16] Yassif says that both he and Bohak "think there were as many magical practices in that period as they were in any other; however, they were not properly documented" (personal communication).

Rabbinic tales also incorporate marks of their authors' attempts to Judaize Gentile practices. Instead of invoking a pagan formula, the name of the Jews' God might be uttered to bring salvation. In this respect it is relevant to consider the trope of efficacious *language* as opposed to efficacious *gesture* (such as Moses stretching out his hand). The practice of using language to affect the course of events emerges in a period that also saw rabbinic examinations of God's efficacious speech in the Creation of the world. There were, as well, rabbinic inquiries into the precise words used by God in creating the world by speaking His own name (Janowitz, 2002: 19–23). If God's uttering his own name had been so consequential,[17] then its use by learned Jewish speakers might equally well affect reality. This reasoning underlies events in a story about Avishay ben Zeruya, who speaks God's name and thereby saves King David from the revenge of Goliath's brother Yishbi:

> Goliath's brother Yishbi, seeking revenge on David, traps him in an oil press, but as the weight lowers, the earth opens beneath the press, saving David. Avishay ben Zeruya, recognizing by signs that King David is in danger, hastens to him.[18] In a second attack Yishbi throws David into the air so that his falling body will be impaled on his spear, but Avishay speaks God's name, which halts David's fall and saves his life.[19]

The same concept of magically efficacious speech shines through the tale of Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair's splitting a river to let him continue on his way to the academy. Moses had initiated the opening of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21) and Joshua had cleared a path through the Jordan River (Joshua 3:5–17), as had Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:8, 14) before him (Bohak, 2008: 33–4). Instead of raising his hand (Moses) or garment

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[17] Talmudic distinctions permitted "the use of 'the Laws of Creation,' a term which was later interpreted to signify the mystical names of God and the angels." Magic that operated with the assistance of demons was prohibited (Trachtenberg, 1961: 19).

[18] The tale also incorporates a miraculously swift journey in which Avishay rides David's donkey.

[19] Yassif recapitulates and lists the tale's component motifs as they appear in the *Babylonian Talmud* (1999: 85–6). *Mimekor Yisrael* (1976) gives two later iterations: "The Brave Abishai" (First Version, 108–9) that draws attention to King David's pride and Abishai's insight and courage, while "The Brave Abishai" (Second Version, 110) replaces Abishai with Goliath's mother and draws on medieval motifs, such as spinning in a tower.

(Elijah and Elisha), Rabbi Pinhas invokes the river's name (Ginnai) to part the swollen stream. His astonished companions ask if they too might cross the river, which Pinhas ben Yair says is possible for any Jew who has never treated another Jew improperly. The underlying story makes unabashed use of magical means, but turns the magic to an ethical purpose (Yassif, 1999: 118). In effect the rabbinic formulation admits the efficacy of magical practice, while transforming it into a homily in support of community cohesiveness. Along with divine interventions to save individuals from destruction, the Rabbinic period was also the point of origin for many stories about Solomon and the archdemon Asmodeus. From these confrontations with the demonic, Solomon routinely emerges victorious because of his legendary insight, expansive knowledge, and political power.

Some rabbinic tales, however, seem so alien to prior Jewish tradition that one feels they must have been imported from other cultures. The same Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair who split the river Ginnai by invoking its name also has the power to recover a pearl for a king by casting a spell and commanding whatever mouse had swallowed it to cough it up. When, at the outset, Rabbi Pinhas is asked to recover the pearl, he denies having magic power, yet immediately lays a spell (ibid.). This sparely told version of the tale, from a Babylonian tractate, offers no reason for the king's having approached Rabbi Pinhas. Other early tales about the pious man present him as scrupulously careful in adhering to Jewish religious law and social custom, suggesting that as a pious and holy persona he incorporates the collective knowledge of an entire people. This could have made him an obvious choice for the king to approach for help.

"Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair and the Pearl" frames its plot within specifically Jewish ethics and religious observance, making it possible to understand the magic at his disposal as nature's bearing witness to his piety. But the story told about a pearl swallowed by one of the kingdom's mice, alien to prior Jewish narrative in fact and in spirit, probably came from outside Jewish culture. After all, the mouse does not act as an entity independent of and separate from the humans it confronts, like Bala'am's donkey or the snake in the Garden of Eden; this mouse is the stage for Rabbi Pinhas's exercise of God's name to produce magic results. As such, "Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair and the Pearl" appears to exemplify a Judaization of a tale borrowed from an alien culture.

The practice of expanding canonical writings by inventing new Biblical characters begins in the Rabbinic period. Goliath's purported brother Yishbi (discussed above) provides one instance, the satanic figure

Asmodeus another. Focusing on Asmodeus and his demonic hordes opened a long and productive narrative path. Asmodeus makes his first appearance in the Second Temple period in the body of Tobias's intended bride Sarah, but in Rabbinic-period tales, demons inhabited the entire world, subverting wavering souls and opposing the righteous (Yassif, 1999: 144–66), and already existing Jewish practices to counter demons begin to enter Jewish magic tales. Amulets created by sages can turn away demons, but their creation and production require detailed knowledge of demons' habits and of the capacities of inanimate objects to relate to demons. For instance, in order for an amulet to protect against the indwelling demons resident in a particular bush, it is necessary to know their precise number. Hence, an amulet prepared for 60 demons is required for a sorb-bush inhabited by 60 of them (Bohak, 2008: 375).

As the Babylonian scholar Rav Huna (c216–296/7 CE) perceived, demons' omnipresence accounted for every imaginable ill: "Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand." Abba ben Joseph bar Ḥama (c270–350 CE), known as Rava, specified the various mischiefs caused by demons: "The crushing in the Kallah [the assemblies of Babylonian students] comes from them. Fatigue in the knees comes from them. The wearing out of the clothes of the scholars is due to their rubbing against them. The bruising of the feet comes from them." Rava's near contemporary, Abbaye (c280–340 CE), declared that demons "are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge round a field" (Yassif, 1999: 145–6). It is hardly surprising, then, to find an increase in spells and incantations in magic tales of the Rabbinic period to protect pious Jews in a demon-infested world. Prayer, however, remains the protective method of choice. Faced with a seven-headed dragon in the academy of the revered teacher Abbaye, Rabbi Aha ben Jacob falls to his knees and prays. One dragon head falls off, and with each subsequent prayer another falls off, until the whole dragon disappears (ibid.: 152–3). In magic tales the Torah itself is the ultimate "shield against injury by demons," and "to be a Torah scholar . . . is to guarantee one's safety in this demon-infested world" (ibid.: 148).

Some composers of magic tales in the Rabbinic period introduce variety by imputing a benevolent helpfulness to individual demons. This innovation verges on an animism that Jewish monotheism had continuously striven to extirpate and that is therefore problematic in the extreme. Nonetheless, such innovative stories made their way into the canon of Jewish magic tales. The demon Bar Themalyon is presented as having allied himself with Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai and Rabbi

Eleazar against a Roman emperor who has issued decrees against the Jews. When the demon meets the two men on their way to supplicate the emperor, he devises a ruse to assist them:

> Bar Themalyon entered the body of the Emperor's daughter and possessed her spirit, causing her to cry out that Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai must be brought to her. As agreed, Rabbi Simeon banished Bar Themalyon with the twice uttered formula, "Bar Themalyon, get out!" thus "curing" the princess. In gratitude the emperor invited the two rabbis to enter his treasury and take whatever they wished, but their only wish was to remove the anti-Jewish decrees. (Ibid.: 154)[20]

If helpful demons exist, then it makes sense for a pious Jew to come to the aid of a helpful demon, when it is under threat from a wicked one, which happens in another Rabbinic tale, "R. Abba Jose of Zaythor and the Spirit of the Spring" (ibid.: 155).

In many Rabbinic magic tales, larger questions about the role of magic and Jewish ethics beg for attention. What constitutes and what determines good and evil? What is permitted and what is prohibited? Does a good *intention* in the magic-worker render magic permissible? Correspondingly, does an evil intention taint magic pursued with demonic forces? Despite the Torah's repudiations of sorcery and the practice of magic, rabbis used magic tales in homiletic contexts. Central questions remain unresolved. Is magic made licit by virtue of being performed by a Jew? What constitutes a true miracle that demonstrates God's intervention in Jewish life? How can one distinguish between a miracle and an illusion?[21] Why, in some stories, do Jewish followers of Jesus who work magic never act benevolently toward Jews, while

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[20] Two other versions of this tale appear in Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael* (1976), under the title "Annulling the Three Decrees." In the First Version (678–680), a female demon occupies Bar Themalyon's role; in the Second Version, as in Bin-Gorion's *Born Judas* (2:193–9, here 197), Asmodeus himself is the helper, claiming in a dream to have been sent by "the Holy and Blessed One … to work a wonder for you" (680).

[21] Both magic tales and commentary in the Rabbinic period address issues surrounding miracles, magic, and illusion. Illusionism for the sake of entertainment, for instance, is permitted. Other apparently magical conjurations must be understood as either miraculous and proceeding from divine power or from a forbidden instance of obtaining magical results by dealing with demons. See the discussion of sages' conjuring a calf and eating it vs a *min*'s conjuring a calf by illusion (Yassif, 1999: 162).

in other stories demons (who by definition assist fallen angels and are therefore necessarily evil) occasionally display benevolence and sometimes purposefully assist Jews? In an unending generative richness, further stories grew up in response to each of these questions.

Even though the Torah appears to repudiate sorcery and the practice of magic, the stance of the Masoretic text as a whole is considerably more complex. In "Jewish magic: a contradiction in terms?," the opening chapter of *Ancient Jewish Magic*, Gideon Bohak makes the point that the Masoretic text's warnings and prohibitions focus more on non-Jewish practitioners than on magic acts themselves, about which there remain confusion, contradiction, and an absence of clarity.

Astrology offers a special case. Probably the most widespread form of divining the future, astrology was omnipresent as a practice in the Rabbinic period, yet in story after story, both plot and contextualizing frames declare that astrology is inapplicable to believing Jews. "Rabbi Akiva's Daughter" is the most famous magic tale to demonstrate this (Yassif, 1999: 163–4). Astrologers had foretold that a snake would mortally wound the young woman on her wedding night, but when she thrusts the pin of a brooch into the wall and kills the snake that is lying in wait, the prediction is undone. In the tale's words her escape from the foretold death results not from magic, but is the natural outcome of her having charitably fed a poor man at her wedding feast, an episode that forms the basis for Rabbi Akiva's homily on deliverance from death through charity. The sages' declaration of Jewish invulnerability to the predictions of astrology recalls earlier tales in which piety gives rise to natural wonders, and to later magic tales in which even a divinely predestined fate is occasionally escaped.

Medieval tales (632–1492 CE)

In the medieval period, a diasporic existence continued to define Jewish identity, regional and national persecutions conditioned Jewish experience, and periodic expulsions from one polity to another exposed Jews to novel cultures and expanded their narrative repertoire. In their diasporic existence in Europe and the Middle East, Jews often translated local literatures into Hebrew (Yassif, 1999: 265), introducing alien story elements into Hebrew narrative. The culture of Islam had carried wisdom tale collections like *Kalila wa-Dimna* and *Sendebar* (known in English as *The Seven Wise Masters*) in the train of its spread along the southern Mediterranean littoral and into the Iberian peninsula, and Christian culture contributed story content from classic medieval Christian collections like the *Gesta romanorum* and the *Fior di virtu* (Bin-Gorion, 1916: 2: 324–33).

At the same time, Jewish vernacular storytelling flourished in a variety of Semitic and Indo-European languages and dialects.

Threats by Christian society to individual Jews and to the Jewish community as a whole provided subject matter for two medieval Jewish magic tales. One concerns the bishop of Salzburg who undertakes to kill Rabbi Judah the Pious (Yassif, 1999: 355). But with foreknowledge of the impending attack, the rabbi works a spell that traps the bishop's head in a window, where it remains until he promises to stop persecuting Jews. At the end of the tale the Bishop converts to Judaism! In a later eastern European tale, "Akdamut Millin," a gigantic priest-sorcerer kills many Jews before a hunchback from the Ten Lost Tribes kills him (ibid.). In both tales, magic banishes present evil from the earth (the Bishop of Salzburg, the Christian priest-sorcerer) and holds persecution at bay, at least for a time. In both tales, magic wielded by Jews, whether by the historical figure Rabbi Judah or by a legendary hunchback, alleviates suffering for Jews as a community rather than bringing happiness on earth to an individual, an outcome that distinguishes Rabbinic tales from later fairy tales.

Demon tales composed in the Rabbinic period continue to hold Satan's helpers, and sometimes Satan himself, responsible for everyday dangers. The tales themselves are often little more than anecdotes, in which a certain demon threatens a pious Jew, who then seeks help from a knowing rabbi. The rabbi recognizes the demon and banishes it by calling it by name and ordering it to depart, a formula easily adapted to any threatening situation.

When a Jew actively seeks out a demon for his own benefit, the ensuing tale becomes more complex. In an early thirteenth-century Hebrew tale, narrative paraphernalia (vast forest, gigantic and hideous black man), rich descriptions of glittering material wealth, and easy access to a parallel spirit world) are more akin to high medieval courtly romances than to Jewish narrative tradition, but this alien content is embedded within a medieval Jewish worldview:

> In the courtyard of a rich Jewish merchant's house there is a mysterious and forbidden doorway. When the man's wife one day approaches the entrance, demons issue forth and snatch her away to Gehenna [Hell]. The husband goes in search of her, fears entering Gehenna himself, and sends a servant. The servant finds his master's wife in a chamber, "the walls and ceiling were covered in glittering gold, and the floor [was] of fine stones, red and sparkling." Wearing golden clothing and sitting on a chair of gold at a golden table set with golden foods, she is served by servants who cut her food and

> pour white wine into a golden cup. Astonished at the grandeur and royal honor accorded her, the servant tells her of her husband's sadness at her loss. She however responds that the room, its furnishings, her clothing, her food, and her drink are in truth fire that consumes her body and flesh, while the white wine is "molten lead" poured into a goblet of fire, and that all sinners of Israel suffer thus, and her husband should repent his evil deeds. Asked about her own evil deeds, she confesses to adultery, desecration of the Sabbath, transgression of ritual law (lying with her husband while menstruating), and lack of compassion for orphans and the poor. She gives the servant her ring as a sign of the truth of her message. Deeply moved by his wife's message, the husband rejoices, "went to synagogue and asked for mercy from the Holy One, blessed be He. With great weeping and a broken heart he repented fully and did not move from there until his soul departed. And a heavenly voice said: 'This man is summoned to the world to come.' This is to fulfill that which is said, 'That I may cause those who love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.'"[22]

The tale accepts the existence of demons, as well as an easy slippage from the human world to the demonic underworld. What distinguishes it from earlier demon tales is the richness of its descriptions: gold covers the walls; the wife wears cloth of gold and drinks from a golden goblet while seated on a chair of gold and surrounded by servants, details that suggest the tale's kinship with contemporaneous courtly romances. But since her wine is in truth liquid lead in a goblet of fire, and since the heat is cosmically punishing, she can think only of warning her husband to repent. The doubled report – in Gehenna from the wife to the servant and in the human world from the servant to the husband – borrows from the stylistics of courtly romance to amplify its moral message.[23]

Literary crossovers between medieval Jewish and Christian storytelling were many. Some were stylistic, like the doubled message in the tale above; some consisted of a simple motif, like the magic healing herb that cures leprosy and wins a poor boy a rich bride in an early

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[22] Yassif translates the untitled tale from Ms. Oxford Bodleian Or. Heb. 135, 338b–339b (1999 358–61). This is my abbreviated account of the tale's plot.

[23] See Susan Einbinder, who touches on the "narrative doublet" as part of a new set of twelfth- and thirteenth-century sensibilities in Hebrew prose literature, in "Signs of Romance: Hebrew Prose and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance" (222). With particular reference to the tale of "King Solomon's Daughter in the Tower" see Michael Chernick, "Marie de France in the Synagogue."

thirteenth-century Bodleian manuscript, *Sefer ha-Ma'asim*.[24] Susan Einbinder identifies French-language romance motifs and techniques in twelfth-century Jewish writings, even in religious texts such as martyrdom narratives (2000: 221–34). A now century-old reference to similar borrowing in a Jewish–Italian context appears in L. Landau's "A German-Italian Satire on The Ages of Man," while "Solomon's Daughter in the Tower" exemplifies the adoption of pre-existing plots from romances in Christian Europe and puts them to use for traditional Jewish purposes (1916: 469n2).

> King Solomon looks into the stars to learn who would marry his beautiful daughter. When he learns that the poorest man in Israel will do so, he shuts her into a heavily guarded high tower built in the sea. The predestined groom eventually sets forth, bereft even of clothing, and takes shelter against the night chill within the carcass of a dead ox. During the night "a huge bird" carries the carcass with the man inside to the roof of the tower, where the young woman finds it – and him. Learning he is a Jew and bathing and anointing him, the princess falls in love and asks him if he wishes to marry her. They marry joyfully with God and the archangels Michael and Gabriel as witnesses, and with a *ketubah* written in the man's blood.
>
> When she becomes pregnant, and the guards inform Solomon. Questioning her the king learns of the wedding ceremony, then asks the man "about his father, mother and family, and from what city" he comes. Then Solomon rejoices, saying "Blessed is God who gives a woman to a man," fulfilling [Psalms 68.7].[25]

In another version, King Solomon is explicitly reconciled to the marriage and promises the couple "a large sum of money," acknowledging that "God made this marriage," a statement that places this version explicitly within the corpus of predestined bride tales.[26]

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[24] Ms. Ox. Bodl. Heb.d.11.#51 (Yassif, 1999: 344).

[25] This version comes from *Midrash Tanhuma* ms. Ox. 183. See Chernick, "Marie de France in the Synagogue" (2007: 185).

[26] The version in question appears in Bodleian Ms. Or 135 and is summarized in Ben-Amos, "Straparola: The Revolution That Was Not" (2010: 438). "'The Omnipotent,' said a Rabbi, 'is occupied in making marriages" (Abrahams, 1890: 172). "[A]n Agadic story, in which the force of this predestination is shown to be too strong even for royal opposition … is effectively illustrated" by the story of Solomon the King whose "future son-in-law would be the poorest man in the nation" (ibid.: 176). The tale Abrahams describes ends with Solomon's words, "Blessed is the Omnipresent who giveth a wife to man and establisheth him in his house" (ibid.: 177).

The eighth-century *Midrash Tanhuma* consists of homilies related to scheduled readings during the religious year.[27] But since each surviving copy of the *Midrash Tanhuma* was the product of manuscript technology, variation crept into subsequent iterations, because "almost every scribe and every copyist . . . thinks himself justified to alter and to enlarge, to shorten and to amplify . . ." (Gaster, 1924: 3). Thus this story appears in later editions of the *Midrash Tanhuma*, but not in all of them. Moreover, content shifts distinguish one telling of "King Solomon's Daughter" from another (ibid.), so that the medieval Jewish exemplum, "King Solomon's Daughter," would have presented slightly different sermon material for synagogue use, depending on the congregation's geographical location and on the particular *Midrash Tanhuma* available to and used by the deliverer of a sermon.

In analyzing his translation of the Oxford Bodleian ms 183, Michael Chernick describes a range of understandings of the story possible for its various medieval Jewish hearers. An educated elite could have pondered it as an allegory of the Jewish diaspora and its eventual return to Israel, while simple listeners could have taken pleasure in it as an instance of Solomon's human pride reined in by God's Divine power. How listeners understood the tale would also depend on which version of "King Solomon's Daughter" they heard, since even minor changes in tellings of the tale change the narrative weightings of individual story parts (Elstein, 2006). The following version elevates the role of Solomon's pride, accentuates the role of magically functioning supernatural forces, and downplays the daughter's agency in her relationship with the young man in the tower:

> King Solomon dreams that the smallest of the tribes will marry the virgin daughter of the largest of the tribes, which he understands to mean that the poorest man in Israel will marry his daughter. In response he shuts her into a doorless tower under heavy guard, and then challenges the prediction with these words: "Now let me see the acts and working of His [God's] Name." And yet the son of a beggar, taking shelter one night in the skin of a dead horse, is carried by a hoopoe to the roof of the very tower in which Solomon's daughter is confined.[28]

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[27] There is considerable discussion of the date of the *Midrash Tanhuma*. References here denote Tanhuma A, the manuscript edited by Solomon Buber and published in Vilna in 1885.

[28] This motif appears in slightly different form in the Old French *Romance of Alexander*, where sailors sew themselves into animal hides and are carried aloft by griffins (Tuczay, 2005: 275). The romance itself first came into being in the third century CE and was translated into Latin, Georgian, Armenian, and Syriac before it entered Old French literature.

> She helps him enter the tower, she eventually conceives a child, and the two marry each other in the sight of God. The tale then returns to Solomon's personal and political greatness, making it clear that the mighty Solomon remains subject to God's intent.[29]

This tale's magic emerges from the impossibility of a thrush-sized hoopoe's flight from the ground to the top of a tower bearing in its beak a man wrapped in a horsehide. Significant for the history of magic tales is the image of a bird-delivered man into a tower that already existed in the pre-1225 Christian European stock of magic tale imagery in "Yonec," a *lai* by Marie de France composed two generations earlier around 1170. That tale's bird, a kind of hawk, flies in by the tower window, turns into a handsome young man who asserts that he is not a demonic illusion, and brings love and a resulting pregnancy to the imprisoned wife of a cruelly jealous husband. Gwen Seabourne, taking the non-judicial medieval practice of imprisoning women as her point of departure, infers that the scenario of a woman in a tower would have been familiar both to Marie de France in England, where she composed her French-language *lais*, and to contemporary readers and listeners in France, where her *lais* soon spread.

Haim Schwarzbaum recognizes that Marie's collection and the roughly contemporaneous medieval animal fable collection, *Mishlei Shu'alim*, share several fables that are unknown in other collections from the same period.[30] And Michael Chernick, in an article provocatively entitled "Marie de France in the Synagogue" (2007), argues that Rabbi Berechiah ben Natronai ha-Naqdan, who translated *Ysopet,* Marie de France's collection of Aesopic fables, into Hebrew, was a likely conduit between Christian court culture and Jewish fabulists, as well as a likely conduit through which Marie's plots could have reached a

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[29] See Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales* (1976: 170–1); or Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael: Classical Jewish Folktales. Abridged and Annotated Edition* (1990: 70–2). Malachi Beit-Arié confirmed Yassif's dating of the Bodleian's Hebrew manuscript (Ms Oxford Bodl. Or. 135) in *Tarbiz* 54.4 (1985): 631–4, which Yassif had published as "Sefer Ha-ma'asim: The Character, Origins, and Influence of a Collection of Folktales from the Period of the Tosaphists" (Hebrew) in *Tarbiz* 53 (1984): 409–29. For a discussion of "King Solomon's Daughter" as a proto-rise fairy tale, see Bottigheimer, 2010: 447–96, here 472–3.

[30] "Introduction" to Bin-Gorion, *Mimekor Yisrael*, 1976: li. See also Berechiah ben Natronai, ha-Nakdan, 1967, *Fables of a Jewish Aesop* (trans. Moses Hadas). Karl Warnke believes that the *Mishlei* is based on Marie de France's collection (1898: lxviii ff.). (See also Brucker, 2011: 209–36, here 210.)

medieval Jewish writer. More significant for the history of magic tales and fairy tale magic is that the magic act in "King Solomon's Daughter" benefits the couple with material happiness here on earth: King Solomon accepts the marriage, holds a great wedding feast, and gives the couple a large sum of money. As such, and outside the context of its framing story about Solomon's intention being subservient to divine power, the tale's happy ending of a reward here on earth (wealth, marriage to a beloved of royal rank) that is precipitated by magical events predates Renaissance Italian rise fairy tales with happy endings and in so doing, diverges from many medieval magic tale endings whose happiness is reserved for the hereafter. The atypicality of "King Solomon's Daughter" is reinforced by the fact that Jewish morality tales incorporating evidence of God's all-surpassing omnipotence and ability to confer treasures previously provided wealth not for personal well-being, but principally to enable a poor family's son to study Torah, further evidence of an orientation away from secular well-being and toward supernal endeavor.

"The Bride and the Angel of Death" is another tale of a marriage predestined by God (and therefore made in Heaven), because, like "Solomon's Daughter," it centers on a marriage-related prediction (therefore emanating from God). As in the Book of Tobit,

> a bride suffers the loss of successive husbands before each marriage is consummated.[31] Eventually, her hand is claimed by a desperately poor cousin, to whom Elijah appears with detailed instructions about the importance of a respectful reception of a particular, and poor, wedding guest. The guest is the Angel of Death come to claim the bridegroom's soul. Accepting his fate, the bridegroom takes leave of his wife, but she, versed in Jewish law, claims the year required by Deuteronomy 24:5 that her husband must be allowed to spend with his newly wed wife. The Angel of Death submits her claim to God, who rebukes the Angel of Death and grants the request.

Subsequently, this tale came to be associated with the celebrated Rabbi Reuven, so that in some versions he himself becomes the subject of interest to the Angel of Death, while in others it is Rabbi Reuven's son who faces death on his wedding night. Whoever the Angel of Death's

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[31] Yassif understands this tale, known only since the Middle Ages, as having roots in the Rabbinic period (1999: 103). However, I consider it a medieval tale, because of the tale's medieval textual provenance.

victim is to be in this medieval tale, the bride remains the salvational heroine, who argues the Jewish legal position so successfully that her groom survives not only the year, but an entire lifetime.[32] "The Bride and the Angel of Death," like other medieval magic tales and earlier rabbinic ones, reflects an orientation away from God-as-Savior-of-the-Nation and toward God-the-Rewarder-of-Individual-Merit. In making a woman's actions pivotal for the tale's outcome, it follows a line recognizable from contemporaneous European medieval narrative, where secular romances included active women and the Virgin Mary actively resolves difficult personal issues suffered by women in Marian legends.

Another early thirteenth-century tale, "Rabbi Yohanan and the Scorpion," is structured within a frametale communicating and validating Jewishness itself. The tale, as translated by Bin-Gorion from Hebrew into German, closes on a Jewish note, as Yohanan ascends a throne married to a woman who has converted to Judaism, thus allowing him to maintain a Jewish home within an alien society.[33] Into this frametale the storyteller inserts magic material and events of the sort that typify medieval Christian courtly romances, but that has not appeared in Jewish magic tales before this point.

> A dying father instructs his son Yohanan to buy the first thing offered to him in the marketplace at whatever price its owner asks. Consequently he pays an outrageously high price for a little box (in other translations a goblet or chalice) that proves to contain a scorpion. Yohanan and his wife impoverish themselves feeding the ever-ravenous scorpion, which grows to a gigantic size. Eventually the scorpion begins to speak, acknowledges all they have done for him, and asks Yohanan what he wants. Yohanan asks for knowledge of all the world's languages, to which the scorpion generously adds the languages of animals, birds, and wild creatures. To the wife, who asks for wealth to feed her family and their household, he grants gold, silver, jewels, pearls, and cattle. Yohanan asks the scorpion who he is, to which the scorpion replies that he is a son of Adam, born

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[32] See Yassif, 1999: 103–5 for further details.

[33] My understanding of the overall structure and intention of the tale differs from that suggested by Vered Tohar, who states, "Johanan in the end is appointed king of a foreign realm and its non-Jewish subjects, and in effect loses his Jewish identity" (2009: 63–4) and that "he has forsaken the path of Judaism and perhaps even converted" (ibid.: 65). Tohar reads "Johanan and the Scorpion" as an instance of a medieval Jewish fairy tale or chivalric romance (ibid.: 56–61).

> before Eve's creation. But when Yohanan asks for his blessing, the scorpion answers, "May God protect you from the troubles that await you." (Bin-Gorion, 1916: 6: 188–93)

The second part of the story pieces together a constellation of magic motifs that remained linked for centuries. It begins with the *pars pro toto* strand of golden hair, whose beauty causes a monarch to fall deeply in love with the person from whose head it fell.[34] This improbable opening event is followed by the hero's passage through a dangerous forest called *ya'ar devei ilaii,* a forest full of beasts named in the Talmud (Yassif, 1999: 272); his encounter with speaking animals from the realms of air, earth, and water; and his freely offered and helpful responses to those creatures.[35] Despite its complement of magical motifs, this section proclaims ethical and religious values to justify the hero's altruistic treatment of the enormous fish whose life he spares:[36]

> A raven drops a golden hair before a childless king, who tells his counsellors to find the woman from whose head the hair has come so that he can marry her. The counsellors call Yohanan to court and tell him to "find her or you and all Jews will die." Yohanan takes leave of his family carrying provisions for three years (32 loaves of bread and 10 gold pieces). Entering an enchanted forest, he meets a huge dog, who wishes to be the same size as other dogs, so that he can sate his

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[34] Note the similarity to the Egyptian "Two Brothers" tale.

[35] These joined motifs re-emerge two centuries later in a magic tale by Giovan Francesco Straparola, in which Prince Livoretto fetches Princess Bellisandra from Damascus for his master the King of Egypt.

[36] My summary translation of the tale as it appears in Bin-Gorion (1916: 6: 188–204). The full text of Bin-Gorion's attribution follows: "Un receuil de contes juifs inédits §VIII in *R[evue] d[es] É[tudes] J[uives]* XXXIII S. 239–54. Die Geschichte ist auch im Maase-Buch enthalten. Zum Wald debe Illaio siehe Bb.Tim. Traktat Hullin S. 59 b. –"Die Erzählung ist allem Anschein nach ein west-östliches Märchen; die Hauptzüge derselben sind deutschen Märchen entnommen, während die Hauptperson R. Chanina semitischen Ursprungs ist." (Grünbaum, Chrestomathie S. 411.) –Ubersetzt (sic) bei Helvicus, Historien I S. 57–68; im Auszug in Mitteilungen der Ges. für jüdische Volkskunde I^2 S. 9–12 (Quellen dazuds. S. 68, 69)" (6:315). The note's closing references to the Grimm tale "Die weisse Schlange" (vol. 1:89–93) and Grimm commentary (3:120, 121 [1856/57 Final Edition of tales and commentary]) reveal Bin-Gorion's indebtedness to a questionable nineteenth-century understanding of tale history and interrelationships, in particular the primacy of Germanic *Märchen*. Bin-Gorion does not date the manuscript source, as does Yassif.

> hunger. Yohanan gives him one of the loaves. Next, Yohanan meets a huge raven, with the same result. Finally, on a riverbank he meets a fisherman who asks if he'll pay ten gold coins for whatever he brings up in his net. Yohanan agrees, and receives an enormous fish worth a hundred gold coins. The fish begs for its life, promising that the good deed will be repaid, and Yohanan throws him back. The fisherman scolds Yohanan, who responds by declaring that God's compassion is valid for all creatures. (Bin-Gorion, 1916: 6: 193–7)[37]

The tale's third section brings Yohanan face to face with the queen from whose head the fateful golden hair had fallen. She manifests magical qualities, such as knowing without being told the nature and reasons for Yohanan's journey to her distant country. She sets two apparently impossible tasks, with a retarding device added to the second, so that all three grateful animals assist the hero:

> Now Yohanan enters a city on the far side of the river, where the queen of the city already knows of Yohanan's mission [to bring her back to the king]. However, she sets two requirements: he must fill one cask with water from hell and a second one with water from Paradise, a task that the raven carries out for him. Next she asks him to retrieve a ring she had lost twenty-five years earlier, which the fish agrees to bring about, since the fate of Israel depends on finding the ring. A wild boar charges him and swallows the ring, just as it is about to be delivered into his hand, but the dog regains it. The tasks having been performed, the queen accompanies Yohanan back to his country. (Ibid.: 6: 197–201)

The fourth part of the story takes unexpected turns:

> On his return Yohanan discovers that his wife has died and that the king has taken his children captive. The king wishes to marry the queen immediately, but she requires a year's delay to prepare herself. Yohanan himself stands high at court, his children are restored to him, and the king gives him his ring as a token that he rules over everything that the king possesses. The royal counsellors become jealous. (Ibid.: 6: 201–2)[38]

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[37] Note that Bin-Gorion uses the phrase *Wunderwald debe Illai* (ibid.: 195).
[38] Note that Bin-Gorion uses the phrase *die Weisen des Landes*, which I assume to be the king's counsellors.

> The jealous counsellors kill Yohanan and hack his body into pieces. The Queen restores his body by rubbing the wounded places with the stone of her ring and splashing his body with water from Paradise, so that Yohanan appears youthful. When she kisses him and prays to God, Yohanan is restored to life.[39]
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> Seeing that she can restore the dead to life, the King goes to war, in the belief that she will restore him should he be killed. But when he dies on the battlefield, the Queen goes to him, and at first follows the same procedure as with Yohanan. But then she sprinkles the king's body with water from hell, and he and his followers burn up. She says disingenuously, "See, restoring to life is not in my hands, but in the Lord's." Yohanan and the Queen return to the palace, where the people choose Yohanan as their king, and he and the queen, who converts to Judaism, live together happily and contentedly and have sons and daughters. (Ibid.: 6: 202–4).[40]

Hair of gold, grateful animals, impossible tasks, reassembling and resuscitating a dead body, these story elements, either separately or linked, are alien to earlier Jewish storytelling tradition.[41] On the other hand, the tale is thoroughly Jewish in its making the entire Jewish people's fate dependent on the hero's carrying out an impossible task, and in having the queen convert to Judaism at the conclusion (which recalls the Bishop of Salzburg's concluding conversion; see page 52). The queen restores Yohanan to life, although she withholds the same magic healing powers from her husband, behavior that inverts a religious position about marital responsibilities and ethics, which may account for the tale's disappearance from Hebrew literature until twentieth-century

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[39] The impossible tasks and their performance, together with the queen restoring the hero's hacked-to-pieces body to a handsomer form than before also form part of Straparola's tale about Livoretto and Bellisandra and are discussed in Chapter 7. Straparola and the author of the Yohanan story may each have taken this uncommon episode from the tale of Medea, but the cluster of shared motifs argues for an immediate textual relationship, the details of which are currently unproven.

[40] Readers familiar with Straparola's tale of Livoretto and Bellisandra in his *Pleasant Nights* will recognize this early thirteenth-century Kabbalistic tale as its likely precursor. See Yassif, 1999: 271–2, where the scorpion stands for "a prime Jewish protagonist" (272).

[41] Yassif also recognizes the tale's narrative elements as "inherently alien to Judaism" (272). Bin-Gorion (=Berdichevsky) included the tale among Kabbalistic tales in volume 6 of *Der Born Judas*.

scholarship returned it to Hebrew narrative.[42] "Rabbi Yohanan and the Scorpion" would be printed in *Yiddish* in the *Ma'aseh-Buch* (1602) and ten years later in German. Its translator, a Jesuit named Christoph Helwig titled it "Von Rabbi Chanina der ein Gefess kauftet darinnen ein Frosch der reden kondre" in his 1612 tale collection *Jüdischer* (sic) *Historien* (57–68).

By the late thirteenth century, magic itself could be treated as a tale's protagonist. In "The Sorcerer" (1281–84) by Isaac Ibn Sahula (born 1244), a handsome young man, having sought in vain to learn magic in the Holy Land, "provide[s] himself with a substantial sum of money and [goes] down to Egypt" (Stern and Mirsky, 1990: 299). There he refuses a simple craftsman's offer to teach him magic, believing he is a charlatan. Understanding the true reasons for the rebuff, the old man uses his magic skill to produce an illusion in which the youth believes he has spent two years in royal service, has married the king's daughter, and has had a son who dies tragically. In his despair the youth seeks the craftsman's help, only to learn that "'all this was vanity, striving after wind . . . the days through which you passed, the catastrophe itself! – all this happened in a twinkling. . . . All these events have befallen you to prove that my claims to magic are true.'" The young man concedes his error and begs to be allowed to study with him: "'There is no wizard who can surpass you in conjuring! No one knows the mysteries as you do! God himself has taught you all this. He has made you foremost in your art'" (ibid. 310). Although Ibn Sahula intends to create a wisdom tale about arrogance as a human failing, the tale's significance for Jewish magic tales lies in its continuing attribution of magic powers to God alone, as well as in its humbling of the tale's youthful hero.

Another medieval Hebrew tale, "Virgil in the Basket" (Yassif, 2009: 245–6), is equally problematic, but apparently more so for modern readers than for its medieval ones. With its virtuous but trickster wife and her tenacious but vindictive would-be lover, the early fourteenth-century "Virgil in the Basket" replicates medieval Christian European characterizations of Virgil as learned in the dark arts. It resembles tales from Christian Europe, in which a virtuous wife bests a conniving lover by exposing him to public mockery (here she suspends him in a basket between her tower window and the ground below for all to mock).

[42] I agree with Tohar that "Johanan and the Scorpion was evidently too problematic and provocative for its intended readership" (2009: 64).

An important difference separates the tale outcomes, however: the Christian German tale cited by Yassif grants victory to the quick-witted wife, while the Jewish European tale imposes a humiliating revenge on the woman by the magician. A superficial interpretation of the two tales' differing conclusions suggests a stark gender divide. Yassif, in contrast, reasons that medieval Jews would have understood the Jewish tale of "Virgil in the Basket." in a context that included the destruction of the Second Temple "as the completion of the tale of revenge left unfinished by the previous tale … as reliable testimony of a great punishment inflicted on the city of Rome, capital of the destroyers of the Jewish capital" (ibid.: 259). It is likely that the medieval Jewish readers who would have understood "Virgil in the Basket" as an allegory of Jewish revenge on the destroyers of the Second Temple would have been the most learned of this tale's readers (and listeners). I include it here as an instance of the difficulties of grasping meanings that might have been imputed to stories by past writers and readers. Some tales give up their meanings readily; others, like "Virgil in the Basket," resist later efforts at interpretation.

In succeeding ages Jewish authors of magic tales compose narrative courses of events to fit the overall conditions in which Jews of that day lived their lives. Stated simply, Jewish stories retained ancient motifs, but adapted them to the various cultures in which their creators found themselves. Tales including magic were no exception. If there is an overarching tendency in the history of the Jewish magic tales discussed in this chapter, it is magic's shifting deployment. Initially (in the Biblical and Second Temple periods), magic assists the Jewish nation. After the destruction of the Second Temple, magic stories detail the protection magic offers individual pious Jews. But in the medieval European period Jewish magic tales begin to invoke magic to bring about human happiness, although more frequently as the realization of Jewish ethics than as the gratification of individual social or material gain.

4
Magic Tales in Medieval Christian Europe

A vast variety of stories circulated in the Christian Middle Ages. Their differing casts of characters reflected Europe's mix of Celtic, Germanic, Latin, and Slavic ethnic groups and its pagan and Christian religious cultures. Story plots communicate peasant, mercantile, courtly, and cloistered social environments, as well as rural and urban communities, narrative riches that were further expanded by importations from Byzantium, and from West, East, and South Asian cultures. There were stories for every taste: bawdy tales of lust and low humor, chaste allegories of hot desire thwarted and heavenly reward conferred. Miraculous intervention saved sinners and routed the devil; chivalric epics eased slow hours at court; and prankish urban tales and abbreviated romances of knightly valor amused literate city dwellers along with less lettered contemporaries, at home and on the road.

The titles of scholarly collections such as *Märchen des Mittelalters* (Tales of the Middle Ages, Wesselski, ed. 1925) and *Märchen vor Grimm* (Tales before Grimm, Uther, ed. 1990), and of studies such as *Formes m*édiévales du conte merveilleux (Medieval Forms of the Magic Tale, Berlioz et al., eds. 1989) suggest an equivalence between medieval magic tales and modern fairy tales, because they use terms – *Märchen* and *conte merveilleux* – generally associated with modern fairy tales. However, this is not the case. Magic functions differently in medieval tales and appears to have been understood by its quondam authors, readers, and listeners in terms of beliefs and values far different from today's understanding of fairy tale magic.

As Jacques Berlioz, Claude Brémond, and Catherine Velay-Vallantin note in the preface to *Formes médiévales du conte merveilleux*, it is difficult to define what is understood by the term *conte merveilleux,* beyond such a tale's having a royal character play a role in an adventure with a

(generally) male protagonist, a (usually) familial antagonist, and (almost always) magical intervention. Berlioz, Brémond, and Velay-Vallantin pay less attention to the way in which medieval European magic tales differ from early modern and modern ones, and so it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the magic in medieval European magic tales cannot be relied on to produce happiness here on earth. No plot could better exemplify the singularities of magic in medieval European magic tales than one about a young and beautiful wife who dies, leaving her 40-year-old husband bereft.

> An angel from God promises the sorrowing widower to revive her in exchange for the next twenty years of his life. Joyfully assenting, the husband turns into a sixty-year-old, and his wife returns to life. However, she soon rejects him for a younger man. Her husband realizes he made a bad bargain, the angel returns his twenty years of life, and the faithless wife dies and – in the tale's own words – rots. (Uther, 1990: 40–4)

This is not a tale with a happy ending of married bliss here on earth so typical of modern magic-propelled fairy tales. Such endings were rarities in the Middle Ages. Instead, a tale's magic, as here, consists principally of miracles wrought by God, the Virgin Mary, saints, or angels to bring about divine justice on earth or eternal reward in heaven, or else magic takes the form of illusions produced by the Devil.

Medieval romances, which contrast sharply with brief exemplary narratives like the one above, range from courtly Arthurian romances through popular chivalric ones such as *Huon of Bordeaux* or *Beuve de Hantone* to novel-like romances such as *Partonopeu de Blois*, Jean d'Arras's prose legend *Le Roman de Melusine* (The Romance of Melusine), and *La Belle au cheveux d'or* (The Golden-Haired Beauty). These long narratives, and others like them, formed part of an enormous body of secular narratives that survives from the late 1100s to the late-1400s in manuscript, and from the later 1400s onward, in printed books.

Arthurian romances loom large throughout western Europe in the medieval period, demonstrating medieval literature's Europe-wide international reach. In great variety, Arthurian romances recounted Round Table-centered *matière de Bretagne* (matter of Brittany), which via translations, reformulations, and compilations made its way from France to Italy (Picone, 1984: 89; Delcorno Branca, 1984: 103). There Lancilotto (sometimes Ancilotto), Tristano, and their companions took on a life of their own, diverting urban citizens and popular audiences (Picone, 1984: 89–90).

Arthurian romances reached their zenith between 1350 and 1450, a period that can be considered an Arthurian age, an *aetas arthuriana*, as the Swiss Italianist Michelangelo Picone calls it (1984: 90). Often read aloud, the romance was a flexible genre. Its heroes' and heroines' adventures could expand or contract in direct response to audience interest or as an expression of individual tellers' enthusiasm and knowledge.

Although the sheer length of romances technically excludes them from a discussion of magic *tales*, their plots were so often abbreviated that in practice a single romance often existed simultaneously in two forms, one a lengthy romance, the other a brief tale. In romances' thousands of versified lines, the magic of monsters, giants, flying horses, and enchantment appears only here and there. But because *all* of the romances' magic survives into tales abbreviated from them, magic occupies a larger proportion of abbreviated tales' total narrative than is the case in romances.

In both romances and the tales derived from them, authors typically present the *results* of enchantment, rather than writing in the detailed processes that medieval grimoires prescribe to achieve those results. Thus, romances and their derivative tales rarely teach modern readers much about the medieval practice of magic or about the forms of enchantments used to produce that magic. Another absence caused by medieval tales' abbreviation from courtly romances is the use of magic functions "as a ploy for developing the inner lives of the characters" (Kieckhefer, 2000: 109). A hero's and his beloved's hope, anxiety, and despair make frequent appearances in a lengthy courtly romance like *Cleomades*, but once *Cleomades* was shortened into the magic tale *Clamades*, most of those references fell into oblivion.

In terms of style, medieval magic tales scour the plots of the romances, epics, and novellas clean of most of their adjectives, and rarely pause to individualize their often nameless heroes and heroines. This characterization overlaps with descriptions of classic fairy tales set out by the Swiss scholar Max Lüthi in his classic *The European Folktale: Form and Nature* (1982). The resulting tales themselves, however, tell stories far different from typical fairy tales. Consider the Sindibad cycle (*not* Sindbad the Sailor!), which entered Europe as *De rege et septem sapientibus* (The King and the Seven Wise Men). Often called simply *Dolopathos*, after the king in its frametale, the *Dolopathos* frametale and stories are exemplary tales, intended to warn a king against taking an ill-considered action, in this case, executing his son.

> The son's life hangs in the balance, because his stepmother, the king's second wife, has falsely accused him of sexually accosting her.

> Under a temporary bond of silence, the son cannot defend himself. To save the young man's life, seven wise men tell the king exemplary tales until the son is free to speak and can exonerate himself.

Assembled by a Cistercian monk named Johannes (birth and death dates unknown) in the Haute-Seille (Alta Silva) abbey in Lorraine in eastern France in the late 1100s, the *Dolopathos* collection contains eight tales altogether, seven exemplary tales and one magic tale. Two of the exempla derive from eastern sources, a fact that makes Johannes a significant mediator of Near Eastern narrative material to medieval European literary circles (Maaz, 1993: 7: col. 573). On the other hand, its single magic tale, with a full array of motifs that lived on in European storytelling, has no known eastern antecedent. For the next three centuries, the *Dolopathos* collection spread its single magic tale far and wide via manuscript reproduction, public readings, and perhaps even private readings:

> Out hunting, a young king chases a doe deep into the woods. He loses sight of her, but comes upon a nymph who while bathing is holding a golden chain. He makes her his wife (as the text chastely says), and she conceives – six boys and one girl.
>
> The king's mother, realizing that her son's new bride will rise above her in wealth and power, feigns fondness for the mother and the seven infants, but secretly orders a servant to kill the babies (each of whom is born with a golden chain around its neck) and replace them with seven puppies. Instead of killing the newborns, the servant abandons them under a tree in the woods, expecting wild beasts to devour them.

With characteristically pious religious expressions, the tale credits God with the children's wellbeing ("But the author and creator of all creatures, God – who sees all, sustains and directs everything, humankind even more than the rest . . ."), recounting how an old hermit nourishes them with doe's milk.

> During this period, the children's mother suffers cruel punishment at the hands of her mother-in-law. Buried naked up to her armpits, fed with kitchen scraps, and spurned by her husband, she is scorned by his subjects. The sun wrinkles and burns her skin, her eyes cross, her hair darkens with filth, and she withers away to skin and bones.

After seven years, her husband – once again hunting in the woods – catches sight of seven children with gold chains around their necks and is touched by natural affection (a medieval belief in blood recognizing blood). Returning to the castle, he tells his mother about them; she in turn dispatches a servant who finds the boys transformed into swans and their sister holding their golden chains. Stealing the chains, the servant brings them to the queen who – to destroy the chains' magic capacity to change the swans back into boys – delivers them to a goldsmith to be made into a goblet. Unwittingly he subverts her intention by using different gold to fashion the goblet.

Without the chains the brothers can't return to their human form, and so they fly away, settling on a pond near their father's chateau. Encountering them once again, the king is amazed at their beauty and orders that they be fed daily from his own table and be kept safe. Their sister presents herself at the chateau each day and begs for food, which she shares with the half-buried woman, unaware that she is her mother. The king, startled by the girl's resemblance both to his wife and to himself, asks her to tell him her story, which she does in the presence of the king's criminous mother and her servant. Their nervous glances and changing color reveal the mother-in-law's secret crime. "And when everything had been unveiled, God whose eye sees everything, whose knowledge nothing escapes, who does not allow that the innocent suffer for too long a time for that the unjust may glorify themselves from their wickedness, allowed it to happen that the old woman had her servant try to murder the little girl. But her father accidentally s[ees] what [i]s happening and intervene[s]." The servant confesses; the king's mother does too (after torture); the goldsmith returns five of the chains intact, with the sixth, alas, incomplete. Hence, five of the brothers return to their human forms, and "the sixth is the one you see on a coat of arms with a golden chain." The king's nymph-wife is raised from her living grave and cleansed of seven years' exposure to the elements, and the mother-in-law is interred in her place.

The tale's magic consists of motifs (a gold chain encircling each child's neck at birth) and process (transformations between human and animal form), but not practice. That is to say, no ritual brings about the boys' transformation into swans, no invocation of demons or angels causes their metamorphoses. The magic simply happens, and in this respect readers are left to wonder about agency. How is one to understand a

magic that is enacted by no character in the tale? From what source of supernatural power does the tale's magic proceed? The text does not answer these questions. Its author may have believed that the questions did not need clarification, because he anticipated that his readers or listeners would understand the source of magic power. If this train of thought is valid, it engenders a second and equally important question: what constitutes the understanding of the role and function of magic posited as shared between author and reader or listener in this magic tale?

A medieval understanding of magic in the *Dolopathos* magic tale may be found in the opening formulaic invocation of "the author and creator of all creatures, God – who sees all, sustains and directs everything, humankind even more than the rest . . ." Here the author signals ultimate agency, clarifying (in general) without specifying (in particular) a divine source of magic powers within the tale. Assuming a shared acknowledgment of God as the author of everything in the known universe deftly exempts an author from the narrative necessity of accounting for the source of this tale's magic, as it is manifested in the appearance of the gold-bedecked infants, the magic transformations of its swan boys, and the miraculous survival of their half-buried mother.

Another medieval Christian magic tale, the verse novella *Asinarius*,[1] was composed at approximately the same time that Johannes de Alta Silva assembled *Dolopathos*, Its plot, like that of the suffering nymph-queen, is one of social restoration:

> A long barren queen conceives and gives birth to an ass instead of an infant. Named Asinarius, he is educated as a prince and acquires social graces such as learning to sing and play the zither that compensate for his repellent appearance. Leaving home, the prince encounters a king who offers him his daughter in marriage. On his wedding night, Asinarius sheds his donkeyskin, but resumes it in the morning. A servant observes this strange process and advises the king to snatch the skin and burn it. Deprived of his skin Asinarius decides to flee, but changes his mind when the king promises to divide his realm with him.

[1] Albert Wesselski considered *Asinarius* the first European "Märchen" (*Märchen des Mittelalters,* 1925: 94). The text is available in English translation in Ziolkowski, 2006: 341–50. A Latin text can be found in *Asinarius,* 1983: 4:137–251.

The language in which *Asinarius* is written, Latin, suggests that its original audience was learned or at least able to read Latin (Gatti, 1991: 149–60).[2] It is plain misfortune, not enchantment, that causes Asinarius to be born as an ass, even though his mother's long sterility is attributed to the hostility of Lucine, the goddess of conception. Thus neither *fëerie*, a misspoken wish, an unintended insult to the fairy world, the mischief-making of malicious fairies, nor a curse at conception causes the prince's rough and hairy donkeyskin. His mother proposes drowning him, but his father intervenes, referring to Jupiter, Juno, Venus, and Hercules to assert the prince's right, as royal offspring, to live: "Whichever of the gods it was who gave him as heir, [Asinarius] will be on the throne as king of my realm, his head will bear his father's crown, and his father's entire glory is owed to him". (Ziolkowski, 2006: 342)

The donkey-prince's remarkable ability to sing and charm his companions with sweet melody results not from fairy gift, but from firm intention and hard practice. The finger-wagging ethic of practice producing proficiency differentiates *Asinarius* from later fairy tales where such a gift is conferred as a benefit to counterbalance or soften a fairy curse.[3]

Similarly consistent with a pragmatic mentality of cause and effect deeply at odds with the tenets of a magic-driven world is the donkey-prince's decision to leave his father's realm. It follows upon a reasoned consideration of his fate should his father no longer be able to protect him from his subjects' scorn. The story's underlying soberness where magic is concerned even conditions the tale's description of the removal of Asinarius's hated pelt: when he climbs into bed with his new wife he simply takes it off. In much the same way, the pelt's final destruction occurs because of human rather than supernatural intervention, when his father snatches and burns it. A prince's being born as a donkey is a counterfactual situation that sits incongruously within *Asinarius*'s overall realism. And yet, the story's author slips this isolated bit of magic into the story so seamlessly that it is narratively frictionless.

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[2] Gatti places *Asinarius* in the tradition of elegiac distichs, which carried Aesopic and other animal tales from the ancient world through the Middle Ages to the early modern era. For more on the role of elegiac distichs in the history of medieval Latin literature, see Rodriguez Adrados, who considers such elegiac distichs a new phase in the evolution of the "género fabulístico" (1991: 26–43, here 27).

[3] In Perrault's "Riquet à la Houppe," for instance, the highly intelligent but ugly hero has the gift of conferring intelligence on the woman who loves him. Of the two sisters, the ugly one is intelligent, the beautiful one stupid.

Like many novellas produced before 1450, *Asinarius* incorporates sexuality as a prominent narrative hinge and refers in particular to the female sex's pleasure in and desire for sexual congress. Asinarius's royal mother provides the first instance of licit female sexual pleasure by implicitly affirming her delight in nighttime frolics (in a complaint that she no longer has that pleasure). The *Asinarius* author later adverts explicitly to sexual readiness in describing the princess's pubic fuzz and developing breasts as physical signs that she will wish to bed whatever man might come along. Consistent with the text's explicit physical description of the princess's body is her father's offer of his daughter in marriage to Asinarius: "Do you wish that our daughter should be given you between your arms, so that she may occupy herself with you in nighttime games?" The subsequent coy chronicling of the wedding night describes the virgin "rush[ing] headlong into the bond of lovemaking."

> "Immediately he leaps into bed and the girl follows. What follows they know – and the bed itself knows. (Nor do I think that the man hiding [the servant who observed the proceedings] could have failed to notice which games and what sorts of games were conducted there by night!) For a time he tempers the heat of amorous desire, and she fulfills the offices of a wife for her husband." (Ziolkowski, 2006: 348)

Lastly the royal newlyweds' heavy slumber precipitates the tale's resolution, for it enables the bride's father to spirit away and destroy the fatal donkeyskin.

At two points, *Asinarius* hints at its (initial) intended reader- or listenership, leaving the impression that its quondam audience consists of wealthy urban dwellers. For instance, the donkey refuses a seat either among the servants or among the knights, claiming he is no ordinary donkey of the stable, but a person of urban nobility, a statement that locates *Asinarius* firmly within that rich treasury of medieval secular urban tales pitting city folks against country bumpkins.[4] Sharing in the donkey's urban identity would have made the prince's country ass-skin

[4] Ziolkowski argues that *Asinarius*'s author "created the poem for a school milieu" (2006: 204), because it "explores themes that would have struck home in young boys as they perused it" (205). My own readings of medieval, early modern, and modern religious and secular school texts suggests otherwise, since school texts nearly always incorporate overt references to the childness of their readers and explicit directions about obedience to their elders and social betters.

deformity doubly amusing to urban readers and listeners. A second hint suggests and describes a cityscape that celebrates the donkey's royal wedding with decorations and acrobatic entertainment before the people, rather than within a country castle or palace (Ziolkowski, 2006: 347, 348).

Asinarius's anonymous author did not invent the story *de novo*. Neither did he take it from Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche," where a centrally important fact is that Cupid's imputed monstrosity was not objective and factual (as was Asinarius's years-long donkey-ness observed by everyone who encountered him), but an imagined beastliness, insinuated by Psyche's jealous sisters. The author of *Asinarius* speaks of a "legend" that provided his facts. Whether that refers obliquely to a dim knowledge of Apuleius's tale (which seems unlikely, since "Cupid and Psyche" seems not to have been known before its rediscovery in the Renaissance), or whether it refers to some other ass-skinned hero, we cannot tell.

The magic of a donkey's paradoxical zither-accompanied sweet singing fascinated the French scholar Claude Brémond. Consider the following ancient proverbs, as did Brémond. "There is neither a zither-playing ass nor a philosophical bull." Or again, "What is an ass's voice in comparison with the lark's?" Or another: "An ass takes no pleasure in the zither." Each of these proverbial sentiments contributes to the foundational (and humorous) cultural and experiential subtext within which *Asinarius* is embedded. Its worldview seems to suit the age, for it enjoyed an undeniably wide currency in the Middle Ages: Hugo von Trimberg lists *Asinarius* in his thirteenth-century *Registrum multorum auctorum* as a book read in schools as well as by general readers (Wagner, 1977: 1: col. 866). From this we may conclude that *Asinarius*'s composition reflects then-reigning assumptions about magic within its urban readership and that its use propagated those same assumptions.

Miracle books and exemplary tales

Miracle books came into being in the same period as exemplum collections. The Cluniac Petrus Venerabilis (c1092–1156) is thought to have gathered material for his *Liber de miraculis* (Book of Miracles) during an 1142 trip to Spain to study Islam. Another monk, the Cistercian Herbert of Clairvaux (?– 1198), produced a second influential book of miracles around 1178 (Lacarra, 1979, 1986; Marsan, 1974). The cultural and literary importance of twelfth-century miracle books lies principally in their having provided a common source of religious images to the entire European continent: they were adopted by later

twelfth- and thirteenth-century compilers in Germany, when Caesarius of Heisterbach (c1180–c1240) published *Dialogus miraculorum* (Dialog of Miracles, 1219–1223) and *Libri VIII miraculorum* (Eight Books of Miracles, 1225–1226); in France, when the Dominican Guillaume Perraud (?–c1250, referred to in English as William Peraldus) produced *Summa de vitiis et virtutibus* (Compilation of vices and virtues, before 1250); and in Italy when Giovanni di San Geminiano (c1260–c1332) gathered together a handbook of tales, *Summa de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum locupletissima* (The most complete compilation of exempla and similitudes).

Most miracle books were composed and distributed in Latin, but some were composed in the vernacular. The *Manuel des pechiez* (The handbook of sins, c1270), constructed for an Anglo-Norman French-speaking audience, was subsequently translated by Robert Mannyng of Brunne (c1275–c1338) for English speakers as *Handlyng synne*. Exemplary material also appeared in Spanish, English, German, French, and Italian, and later in languages of the European periphery, such as Icelandic and Czech.

Exemplary tales existed in the thousands in the Middle Ages, but because modern scholars long turned away from this narrative form, a dark and general oblivion enveloped them until the late twentieth century. Europe's first exemplum collection, the *Disciplina clericalis* (Education for clerics) was composed by Petrus Alphonsus (c.1065–after 1121), a Spanish Jewish convert to Christianity, who introduced Moorish, Jewish, and Middle Eastern material into the European exemplary tradition. Petrus Alphonsus, believed to have been physician to Alfons I of Aragon (1073–1134) and Henry I of England (1100–1135), traveled to Britain, where *Disciplina clericalis* was translated into English, and where the genre as a whole was enthusiastically adopted. Indeed, a large proportion of medieval exemplum collections' authors were British by birth or association: the 1140 *Gesta regum Anglorum* (Deeds of the English kings) by William of Malmesbury (c1095–c1143), the c1150 *Liber moralium dogmatis philosophorum* (The Book of Doctrine of the Moral Philosophers) by Guillaume de Conches, *Gemma ecclesiastica* by Gerald of Wales (Geraldus Cambrensis, Jewel of the Church, c1146–c1223) written sometime between c1190 and c1200, and *De naturis rerum* (On the Natures of Things) by Alexander of Neckham (1157–1217), which was in place by 1200. For source material, these authors turned to works treating history, natural phenomena, and divine manifestations. Continental chronicles – for instance the early thirteenth-century *Chronicon* (Chronicle) of the Cistercian Hélinand de Froidmont (c1160–1237?), the *Speculum historiale* (The mirror of history) of the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais (c1190–1264?), and sometime after 1287 the *Chronica*

(Chronicles) of the Franciscan brother Salimbene of Parma (1221–after 1287) also contained tales that could be put to use as exemplary exhortations to solidify a Christian identity among their listeners.

The world of medieval exemplary tales as a whole is one in which the strangely unaccountable is miraculous rather than magical, a world in which divine figures routinely intervene in daily life and save the sinful from danger when they repent. Exempla provided memorable material communicating precisely this kind of message for high and late medieval preachers, with these stories' currency attested to by their ubiquity in the early thirteenth-century sermon collections of Jacques de Vitry (c1160–1240) and those of his contemporary Odo of Cheriton (c1185–c1247). Exempla collections were generally organized for easy reference and practical use, with stories arranged either thematically or alphabetically, thus easing the search for colorful narratives and apt embellishments. Organization was necessary, because an individual exemplum collection might contain up to 1,000 stories.

The sheer number of surviving manuscript copies of exemplum collections confirms how widespread was their medieval distribution and use. All pre-print collections of exemplary tales were copied by hand scores of times. In the Liège University library alone, for instance, there are some 2,000 exempla manuscripts originally produced for the brothers of the Holy Cross. The fact that so many manuscript copies have survived suggests that the numbers of manuscript exemplum collections once in circulation far exceeded those that now lie ready to hand in libraries and archives. Like other widely used medieval manuscripts, exemplum collections also figure prominently among pre-1500 printed books.

The collections themselves were carried on the person of mendicant monks who journeyed, usually on foot, who slept on the same straw that their hosts did and who ate at humble people's boards. Small portable excerpts suffered equally hard use. Written upon, stained by sweat, frayed and torn by constant use, they lost pages, with those most often turned to the first to disappear.[5]

Scala coeli

In the early fourteenth century, the Dominican monk Johannes Gobi Junior (birth date unknown–c1350) compiled one of the medieval era's most successful collections of exemplary tales, the *Scala coeli* (Stairway

[5] This is equally evident in all medieval manuscripts that saw hard use, such as Petrus Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*. See Bottigheimer, 1994b.

of Heaven). Assembled soon after *Dolopathos* and *Asinarius*, between 1323 and 1330 in a monastery in Provence, the kinds of tales it contains are of broad interest and long-term significance. Each of the Dominican preacher's stories is a model of clarity. Structured like exemplary stories in earlier collections, each begins with an announcement of the story's intended teaching, continues directly with the story itself, and ends with an explanation that pounds its message home. Like his contemporaries, Johannes arranged the stories alphabetically by category, beginning with *abstinentia* (abstinence) and ending with *usura* (usury). To find just the right story for a mercantile, courtly, or domestic audience, preachers could consult headings such as "Merchant," "Knight," "Wife," and "Husband."

The *Scala coeli's* interest for historians of magic tales lies in the fact that mendicant preachers delivered its stories to ordinary people,[6] and in this way the *Scala coeli* spread far and wide a host of ancient and recent written sources that the well-read Johannes Gobi listed in his preface: secular stories from Aesop, Macrobius, Hermes Tresmegithus, Ovid, Seneca, Suetonius, *Historia Troiana* (Trojan history), and *Historia Antiqua* (Ancient history) as well as some from the writings of Christian theologians of antiquity along with *Gesta Romanorum* (Deeds of the Romans), *Liber de Septem Sapientibus* (Book of the Seven Sages), *Miracula Beate Virginis* (Miracles of the Blessed Virgin), *Alphabetum Narrationum* (Alphabet of Tales, c1308–1310) and several other exemplum collections, such as *Gesta Alexandri* (The Deeds of Alexander), and *Barlaam*. The *Scala coeli* thus became a compendious source of popular knowledge of magic tales (along with exemplary and Aesopic tales), and it began relaying these stories to Europe's sermon-hearing and church-going listeners soon after Johannes Gobi compiled it. Rudolf Schenda draws attention to the importance of the preaching orders in maintaining and spreading narratives from 500 to 1500 naming the following preachers: Jacques de Vitry (1160/70–1240), Caesarius of Heisterbach (c1180–1240), the thirteenth-century Etienne de Bourbon (1205–1261), and the fourteenth-century John Bromyard (?–?; Schenda, 1993:141).

The printing press carried Johannes Gobi's stories into the early modern world, where they continued to spread. Printings of *Scala coeli* are

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[6] The single "heard" tale not attributed to a religious source, No. 686, recounts a miraculous intervention by the Virgin Mary that was later documented as Miracle No. 22 in a 1434 Marian miracle collection by Jean Herolt (died 1468). For more on collection-to-collection crossover, see G. Philippart and Brenda Dunn-Lardeau (1993).

recorded in the Germanies (Lübeck 1476, Ulm 1480, Strasbourg 1483), the Low Countries (Louvain 1485), and England (Boston 1505; see also Huet, 1920). The history of the contents of *Scala coeli* as it passed from manuscript to print production strongly suggests that story taste changed over time, and that this change took place in conjunction with technological innovation. The technological aspect is centrally important, because printing presses vastly expanded the number of individual people's exposures to identical versions of Johannes Gobi's stories. We cannot know whether the changes made to the contents of *Scala coeli* represent publishers' assessments of public taste, censors' imposition of newly formulated criteria of public morality, or readers' real or reported expressions of personal choice and demonstrations of buying power. All we know is that 130 of his original 1000 tales were eventually omitted. An analysis and characterization of the omitted tales might well indicate what material or belief elements fell from favor between 1476 and 1505.

The fact that the same tale could be disseminated from hundreds or even thousands of sermon books to one generation after another means that tales' indwelling concepts and constructions of magic had the potential to establish as well as to confirm nearly identical patterns of thinking about magic among widely disparate peoples in medieval Europe. To put this another way, even though magic tales constituted a very small proportion of exemplary collections' narrative inventory, magic tales survived preferentially. Moreover, the survival of a tale and its image of magic from one generation to another did not need to depend on one individual's telling it to another individual, as has long been believed among folklorists, because the same sermon book with the same magic tale provided a later preacher with exactly the same tale – with much the same, or identical, wording – for a new generation of listeners. This mechanism would neatly account for retention of a given story's structure and style among oral informants, had stories been collected in the field by folklorists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The generative power of the *Scala coeli* shows itself in the large number of its tales that re-emerged as folktales in subsequent centuries (Polo de Beaulieu, 1993: 598–600.). Other exemplum collections also spread plots along with their magic. The *Legenda Aurea* (Golden Legend, c1260) of Jacobus de Voragine (c1230–1298), probably the most read – or heard – book in medieval Europe, initially in manuscript and later in incunabula incarnations, also contributed to the spread of dragon-killer tales, as well as narrations of miraculous events that in later centuries would be understood as expressions of magic (Fleith and Wenzel, 1996: 8: col. 846, 851–2).

Until this point I have offered general, but not specific, evidence that exemplum collections were effective in spreading their tales. Let us now consider some test cases. In terms of geographical reach, it is worth noting that one *Scala coeli* exemplum (No. 618) turned up in the late Middle Ages in a manuscript in far-distant Iceland (Berlioz et al., 1989: 89). In terms of chronological persistance, *Scala coeli* stories were excerpted into both secular and religious story collections, well into the early modern period, that is, into the 1600s. The influence of Johannes Gobi's *Scala coeli* stories is well-nigh incalculable. His tale No. 538 about a youngest son's obtaining the water of life for his ailing father marks a point of origin for a motif cluster that recurs in many later European fairy tales. However, the uses to which the motifs are put in the *Scala coeli* story and the understanding of the magic those motifs communicate express apparent assumptions about magic that are specific to a medieval Christian worldview and that are cloaked in religious imagery:

> A king, suffering from a malady curable only by water from the fountain of life (*aqua fontis viventis*), promises his kingdom to whoever brings him some of its water. His first son searches river banks (*per riparias*), the second plains (*per planicies*), and the third mountains (*per montes*). There the third son finds an elderly man who directs him to the fountain of youth (*fons juventutis*). To reach it, however, he must overcome a mortally dangerous serpent, mustn't look upon a group of girl choristers, mustn't accept arms from knights and barons whom he meets, and finally must open a palace gate covered with bells without causing them to sound. Within the palace a girl holding the key to the fountain of youth tells him that she is not only to give him the restorative water but is also to marry him. Returning home after his marriage, he receives his father's realm.[7]

In this story a dangerous quest for a mythic substance (the water of life) is impeded by a series of tasks and trials. The hero is given important information by an unidentified old man, but the hero's success depends solely on courage and obedience unaided by other-worldly or magical assistance. The girl's straightforward explanation of why the young prince is to marry her takes only three lines of Latin and gives a good example of this story's dry style (Gobi, ed. Polo de Beaulieu, 1991: 399).

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[7] My rendering is based on the French translation in Berlioz et al., 1989: 99–101. The Latin original is in Polo de Beaulieu, 1991: 399–400.

As far as secular magic vs religious miracles is concerned, the last third of the narrative reveals and delineates the tale's religious content in an explicitly worded tripartite medieval scholastic explanation: on the spiritual level, the three human sons of a sick father represent three sorts of people: the first searches for pleasures (*delicias*) and frequents coastlines; the second looks for pleasures (*delicias* again) on the plains, the traditional Biblical locus of sin; the third passes through penitance (*penitencias*) and takes to mountain roads. Now come the third son's four trials (*quattuor impedimenta*) in which he encounters the serpent's taste for vengeance (*affectio vindicte qui est coluber*); the pleasures of the flesh as represented by women (*carnis complacentie que sunt mulieres)*; a knight's attachment to earthly things and his fear of poverty (*affectio rei terrene et timor paupertatis qui sunt milites*); and an appetite for recognition and preferments represented by the gate's bells (*appetitus honoris qui sunt campanule*). To withstand the assigned trials, the commentary explains that the third, successful, son uses both material and spiritual means, namely, the staff of the memory of the Passion of Christ, a flight into poverty, the hoped-for celestial reward, and the "sponge of humility." Only he, the third and youngest son, is able to penetrate the palace of grace, find spiritual love, and obtain the water of the remission of sins together with the young woman within the palace who becomes his spouse (Berlioz et al., 1989: 100–1; Gobi Junior, ed. Polo de Beaulieu, 1991: 399–400). Arguments such as these permeated medieval exegesis, their broad currency suggesting that preachers believed that their readers and listeners found them persuasive. Above all, it is religious purity rather than magical assistance that wins the day.

As Gobi tells the story, it contains a cluster of *motifs* – the youngest of three brothers, a quest, tasks and trials the successful completion of which gains a royal bride, and the water of life – that would come to characterize the magic-propelled action of many modern fairy tales, but Johannes Gobi makes *these* motifs into a religious exemplary tale that typifies a medieval Christian worldview. If this tale of a quest for magic healing were a modern restoration fairy tale, either its hero would suffer from the difficulty of performing the tasks and trials set for him, or else his indwelling goodness would elicit magic help from a magic helper to accomplish his tasks. But neither as the story is told nor as it is interpreted by Johannes Gobi does magic help or does a magic helper appear in any manner that corresponds to a fairy tale paradigm. Instead the story admits its listeners to a world in which a hero negotiates his way through and around allegorically explained magical impediments by following detailed instructions. Johannes Gobi's commentary lengthens

the tale by half, effectively denaturing the story's thrust and gutting its narrative body, so that his tale, together with its commentary, leads us into a strange world. The magic remains unquestioned, as do the instructions, and in this rare instance magic leads to a happy ending here on earth.

Another exemplary tale from the high Middle Ages has a plot and an outcome that confound a modern reader:

> A not yet marriageable girl ("Ein noch nicht mannbares Mägdlein," trans. Wesselski, 1925: 46) is betrothed to a knight who goes abroad, leaving her and his realm under the protection of his seneschal. During the knight's absence the seneschal attempts to sexually violate the girl, and in her dismay, the young woman strangles him while he sleeps and seeks help in disposing of the body from a compatriot at court. The friend, however, refuses to help unless she sleeps with him. She promises to do so ("with her mouth, but not from her heart"), and when he carries the corpse to a bridge, from which he means to dump it, she gives carrier and corpse together a mighty shove, and both disappear into the river.
>
> Eventually the young woman's husband returns. To cover her lost virginity, she slips a virgin maid into the marriage bed on her wedding night. But once deflowered, the maid refuses to leave the marriage bed, and so the heroine smothers her, stuffs the body into a chest, sets it on fire, awakens her husband, and flees with him to safety.
>
> Long afterward, the young woman's conscience leads her to confess her sins to her chaplain. He prescribes a daily penance (wearing a hair shirt) and a weekly penance (bread and water). But then the devil spurs on the confessor to woo her himself. He demands that she go to bed with him, threatening to expose her past to her husband if she demurs. Trusting in God's mercy, she refuses the confessor's advances.

The young wife's penitence and her trust in God comprise the story's religious and narrative pivot, and are presumably why medieval preachers told this story.

> The confessor then reveals the wife's history to her husband (omitting his own attempts to extort sexual compliance), and pledges his eyes as guarantors of the truth of his story that she is subject to a daily and a weekly penance for the sins he has just revealed to her husband. The following Friday the husband and the confessor meet in her room, where her drink proves not to be penitential water but

> delicious wine (because God has transformed it) while under her dress there is not a hair shirt, but soft linen (because God has transformed it too). The knight then tears out the confessor's eyeballs. (Wesselski, 1931: 46–7)

The story's final words emphasize its moral: "And so God saved the repentant woman who had given up sinning and relieved her of her guilt in his great mercy."[8] The tale of the triple murderess, initially pre-pubertal (*noch nicht mannbar*) and later penitent and reformed (*bereuende und der Sünde entsagende*) (Wesselski, 1925: 47), is not one of murders punished, but of penitence rewarded. The magical transformations of the water and hair shirt that save her lie solely within God's gift, far from any sorcerers' charts, retorts, or conjurations.

Marian legends

From the late 1100s to the mid-1400s secular tales without magic recounted women's witty independence and self-protective actions in sexual relations (Bottigheimer, 2000). Towards the beginning of this period, religious tales, including exemplary tales, used magic to exonerate their heroines. Nowhere was this more the case than in Marian legends. Directed primarily at women, they valorize their heroines and sympathize with their suffering. In these stories, women's difficulties are generally caused by rapacious male relatives or exploitative churchmen, such as the young wife's confessor in the exemplum discussed above. Here is another tale that provides a divinely governed magical cover-up for a different but equally horrifying sequence of events, maternal incest and infanticide:

> An elderly Roman senator is married to a young, beautiful, and virtuous wife. Long childless, the wife bears a handsome son shortly before the senator's death. In her bereavement, the senator's widow

[8] Wesselski took this story from the *Compilatio singularis exemplorum* reproduced in Alfons Hilka (1913). Wesselski also cited Reinhold Köhler, *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. Johannes Bolte (1898 f.) 2: 303–99; Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes* ... 217 ff., A.L. Jellinek in *Euphorion* 9: 163, and Bolte-Polivka, *Anmerkungen_zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* (1913 f.) 3: 449ff. Also *Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum* (Vol. 3 was edited by J.A. Herbert in 1910) 3: 563 (#46); and A. Bricteux, *Contes persans* 38 ff. E. Tegethoff reworked Méons text in 1:109 ff. (All citations are from *Märchen des Mittelalters* [208–9].)

takes the baby into her bed, and there he sleeps night after night until he grows to adolescence. One night while asleep, he impregnates her. When she realizes that she has conceived a child by her son, the widow sends him away to shield him from knowledge of the sin he unknowingly committed, bears the incestuously conceived baby, kills it, and secretly buries it.

Later, burdened by guilt, she disguises herself as a Master of Arts and goes to Rome. There her eminent intelligence and wise counsel gain the attention of the Holy Roman Emperor, who makes her his trusted adviser. But one day the devil seeks out the pope and reveals her past sins to him, promising to dig up the baby's bones as proof of his accusations. The "counselor" denies the charge and throws herself on the Virgin Mary's mercy, promising to build her a fine chapel if she delivers her from discovery and execution. The Virgin Mary complies, the Devil digs in vain, and the exonerated widow erects a chapel dedicated to the Virgin.

This is not a unique plot, but one that typifies the short-lived medieval genre of Marian legends in which Mary miraculously aids women in need of help. Reading Marian legends leads to the conclusion that they are less about maintaining morality than about establishing Mary's supremacy over the Devil by telling stories in which Mary's supernaturally effective magic powers exceed the Devil's.[9] Stories like these assume that magic exists as a discrete entity and that victory goes to the person who controls the more powerful magic. Whether the magic in question functions in the real world or solely in a narrative is not spelled out in the stories themselves.

Unlike Marian legends, Bible stories are a vanishingly small component in the corpus of medieval magic tales as a whole. In practice, Bible content itself began to reach a larger readership only at the end of the twelfth century, with the 1170 *Historia Scholastica* by Petrus Comestor (?–1178). For the use of students at the Paris "schools" (later the University of Paris), he retold narrative parts of the Old and New Testaments, appending to each *historia* a commentary derived principally from the church fathers. Lot's wife dramatically turns into a pillar of salt, the Red Sea opens up for Moses, and chariots of fire surround

[9] Much has been written about devils, particularly within the context of Reformation beliefs, but a medieval story like this one has long remained below the radar.

Elisha, but Petrus Comestor made these episodes stand for scholastically mediated messages. Occasional glimpses of medieval attempts at the natural sciences glimmer through his prose, but the *Historia Scholastica*, despite its profound influence in other areas, sent little of its Biblical material into popular narrative. That the principal source of Biblical knowledge for the largest number of people (I except theologians from this statement) in the Christian Middle Ages was not the Bible itself, but a rewritten narrative, also distinguishes the use Christians made of the canonical Bible from that made by Jews (Bottigheimer, 1996: 14–23; Morey, 1993).

The absence of magical practice in magic tales

"Courtly society was ridden with magic and fear of magic," notes Richard Kieckhefer in *Magic in the Middle Ages* (2000: 96). Parents with the means to do so often had a horoscope cast for a newborn child. Gems were believed to have curative powers, their individual uses delineated in lapidaries. Alchemy thrived because of beliefs that all matter consisted of earth, air, fire, and water, whose differing proportions determined matter's form – for instance, gold or lead (Kieckhefer, 2000: 100–1, 116–39). Cleverly crafted medieval automatons that roared and sang could well have appeared to be magic-made-real before one's very eyes and might have contributed to Kieckhefer's observation about courtly society's sense of magic.

Lengthy courtly romances, whether about figures like Tristan and Isolde or about Alexander, were composed specifically for the ruling classes of Europe's Christian population, the same segment of society discussed by Kieckhefer. Although these romances are replete with the paraphernalia referred to in medieval handbooks of magic and are based on belief systems foundational for their use, they do not advert to specific procedures that those handbooks prescribe to achieve magical results. Neither do the magic tales based on romances, but magic *tales* reached all segments of society, spreading much the same magic far and wide.

Citing dragon-slaying tales, Eli Yassif notes that in Jewish tales miraculous encounters with a demon or dragon occur in places where a Jew is closest to God, that is, in a place of study, whereas in Christian magic tales, those encounters take place in natural surroundings near a lake, or in a field or forest (Yassif, 1999: 153), that is, in the kinds of places associated with pagan practices. Interior spaces seem alien to most magic tales. The sorcerer's workshop and his retorts, the detailed

instructions and the careful implementation of a grimoire are not to be found in the magic tales examined here, which are shorn of all narrative elements beyond their forward-moving linear action. There are no echoes or reflections of pagan and Christian magic as exercised by wizard priests and as uncovered by the Renaissance Inquisition (Duni, 2007: 47–74). Magic as it was practiced in the real world is a dim presence indeed in brief magic tales.

The magic in Marian legends and exemplary tales seems to have been meant both to form and confirm religious identity and belief. Typically, magic in these genres comes about because of individuals' actions, which is to say, pious behavior elicits miraculous and helpful intervention, which characters then recognize as of divine origin, while evildoers are struck down or vanquished, equally miraculously. In medieval *secular* magic tales magic is different, although with a steady thrum of invocations to God and associated Christian divinities in the background, it is hard to posit such tales as wholly secular. Derived for the most part from courtly romances, the magic of a medieval secular tale often consists of a magic object's expression of inherent magic powers. Sometimes that magic object's power is available to whoever possesses it, whether that person is good or evil. Sometimes its powers can be manipulated only by (usually) him for whom it has been intended or for (usually) him who uses it with good intent.

Even as identities and beliefs in the Christian Middle Ages were forming, they were also changing, if the evidence from magic tales is a reliable indicator. Nothing brought about change more quickly than the quickening pace of urbanization and the industrial processes and social transactions that were part of urban life. Worldviews shifted as gender roles changed, particularly in northern Italy, the epicenter of popular narrative. With a high population density, a money economy, increasing prosperity, and broadly literate populations, these cities were characterized by a literacy that writers could turn to good account. And they did so, using magic extensively, as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. But first we must give some account of magic in a sample of Muslim magic tales.

5
Magic Tales in the Muslim Middle Ages

In contrast to the two previous chapters, only two medieval manuscript texts inform the greater part of this chapter.[1] One, *Tales of the Marvellous* (Al-hikayat al-'ajiba) contains 18 stories of its original 42; the other, *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Thousand and One Nights), consists of the frametale, five narrative cycles, three novellas and the opening pages of a fourth from the earliest substantially surviving manuscript of the *Thousand and One Nights*, or *Arabian Nights*, as it is popularly known. It might be objected that the narratives in these two collections are not "tales" *per se*. That objection is valid for *Tales of the Marvellous,* some of whose stories are longer than the half hour or so that I accord a "tale's" telling, but in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Dinarzad routinely denotes each of Shahrazad's partial tellings of a lengthy narrative as "what has been said," the Arabic phrase rendered in English as "story" or "tale." (See "terminology" in Chapter 1, p. 4.) In this light, it is justifiable to redefine a lengthy narrative like "The Two Viziers" as a composite that consists of a series of brief tellings that cumulatively comprise the narrative as a whole.

The *Thousand and One Nights*, exists today in many iterations. I will use the title *Alf Layla wa-Layla* for the fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript; *Mille et Une Nuit* for the translated, edited, and expanded version of Antoine Galland (1746–1715); *Arabian Nights* for the specifically western tradition that grew from of Galland's version; and *Thousand and One Nights* for the corpus as a whole that now exists in canonical Arabic-language collections such as Calcutta I (1814, 1818) and II (1839–1842), Bulaq (1835), and Breslau 1824–1843), and their

[1] After this chapter was completed, a copy of Claudia Ott's new translation of the fourteenth-century Andalusian *Mi'at Layla wa Layla* into German became available to me. It is treated in a coda to this chapter.

associated translations. Above all the Calcutta II edition exemplifies the material of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and it is now available in the 2008 three-volume translation of Malcolm C. Lyons that effectively replaces the annoyingly florid Burton translation.

Both *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* date from the end of the Muslim Middle Ages, with proposed manuscript datings for *Tales of the Marvellous* as early as the late 1200s or as late as the early 1400s, and for *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscript sometime between 1450 and the opening years of the 1500s at the very latest.[2]

The geographical origins of both manuscripts are similarly close, both lying in Egypt and the Levant, today's Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon. The Levant had long been one of the centers of culture and trade within the reach of Muslim suzerainty in the late 1400s – from southern Spain and Morocco through the Middle East to the Sultanate of Delhi in India, and including the European Balkans, the lower Danube, Greece, and Turkey, and many tales in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* incorporate familiarly couched references to cities along the land-based trade routes from today's Turkey, Egypt, and the Levant to the East.

Within the vast area under Muslim control in the medieval period, lay the kingdom of Granada in Spain; the Almoravids, Almohads, and Marinids following hard upon one another in and around Morocco; Mamluks in Cairo; Seljuks in Turkey and beyond to Persia; Abbasids in Baghdad until 1258; and Ghurids and their Mamluk successors in the Sultanate of Delhi. Within and among them, there existed multitudes of small jurisdictions.

Governance was complex. Local lords tightly controlled towns and cities, and higher officials provided regional oversight. In local and regional contexts, ambitious families conspired to seize power, and when successful, replaced existing rulers with members of their households. Failure resulted in brutal reprisals that eradicated individual rebels and entire families.

Numerous points of contact and overlap linked Muslim, Jewish, and Christian cultures throughout the Mediterranean world, with consequent opportunities for story content to move across political and religious borders. The directions of narrative flow remain the subject of lively discussion. If we are to believe what we read in the stories themselves,

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[2] In the 1980s Heinz Grotzfeld recognized the Egyptian *ashrafi* dinar mentioned in the text only began to circulate in 1425 (Grotzfeld, 1984) and may not have entered the awareness of the further reaches of the Levantine world until decades later, in the 1500s (Grotzfeld 1996).

both viziers and sultans prized good storytellers and rewarded them richly. Storytelling was an evening activity (al-Nadim 2: 714, cited in Irwin, 1994: 82). Both the *Alf Layla wa-Layla* frametale as well as many of the stories it encloses extend evening storytelling into *night*time; the Caliph Harun al-Rashid typically calls for a story when he can't sleep; and Shahrazad tells Shahriyar stories even later, in predawn hours.

Story collections were documented in the Muslim world as early as the 900s, when Muhammad Ibn Ishâq al-Nadîm, a Baghdad bookseller, noted the titles of several such collections in his 987 CE *Fihrist* (Dodge, 1970: 2: 712–13). One that he described had been undertaken by a contemporary, Abû 'Abd Allâh Muhammad ibn 'Abdûs al-Jahshiyârî, who was, he wrote, in the process of assembling a total of one thousand stories from Arabic, Persian, and Byzantine sources. Alas, al-Jahshiyârî died after recording only 480 of them, and his ambitious collection has since disappeared. Other story collections, however, survived (Binkley, 1997).

Tales of the Marvellous, a miscellany discovered in the Istanbul Sophia Library in 1933, provides a rich narrative trove in Arabic that includes some tales known from *Thousand and One Nights*. Although long translated into German, it became available to an anglophone public only in 2014, when Malcolm C. Lyons translated it into English.[3] The other text whose magic is analyzed in this chapter is the medieval Syrian manuscript critically edited by Muhsin Mahdi and translated into English by Husain Haddawy in 1990. This translation enables non-Arabic-reading scholars to meet the *Thousand and One Nights* in its earliest extant guise, before Galland embellished his 12-volume much-expanded edition of that fifteenth-century Syrian manuscript with French cultural refractions and literary alterations in the early eighteenth-century.

The years in which the extant manuscripts of *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* were written were fraught with political turmoil. Mamluks, who created the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt in 1250, governed an empire centered in Cairo that eventually embraced the entire Levant. On its northern edge in today's Turkey, Ottomans succeeded to power as the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum broke up, and after they gained control of Constantinople in 1453, established relations with the Mamluk Sultanate in Cairo, extending their influence southward and eastward into Syria. Military conflict followed, with the Ottoman

[3] Because the translation of *Tales of the Marvellous* has been underway at the same time as my composition of this chapter, I have used the German translation of the *Hikayat* (Al-hikayat al-'ajiba), as it appears in *Das Buch der wundersamen Geschichten*. 1999, edited by Ulrich Marzolph.

Selim I winning a decisive victory over Mamluk troops north of Aleppo in 1516. Six months later, in early 1517, Ottoman forces took Cairo and made Egypt an Ottoman province. During the next few centuries Ottoman-linked local representatives dominated day-to-day life and commerce in Egypt and the Levant. This capsule history glosses over a multitude of political and commercial alliances and conflicts in the Mediterranean, the Levant, Persia, and the Indian subcontinent in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries,[4] but it captures the frame within which both manuscripts used here, *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla,* came into being.

The 1400s and 1500s were also a time of continuing contact between Europe and the Levant. Not only did European pilgrims flow through the area on their way to the Holy Land, but Venice had long had commercial relationships with the Levant, and France and England were beginning to move into that lucrative trade. There was also continuing commercial contact between the Levant, the Far East, and the eastern coast of Africa.

The effects of magic in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla*[5]

In the magic tales that follow, authors create characters who perceive magic in different terms from those in the Jewish and Christian magic tales of Chapters 3 and 4. Despite frequent textual assertions that all magic is ultimately God's alone, magic often lies within the domain of demons' purposeful maleficence in both *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa- Layla*, where it portends and often produces betrayals of the trusting, exploitation of the unwary, and destruction of the faithful. In these stories pious Muslims turn to God for support and assistance against adversity, invoking his compassion, but they never knowingly manipulate the forces to which demons so clearly have access. (In this connection, it is necessary to remind readers that "Aladdin" entered the *Thousand and One Nights* canon only in the early eighteenth century.)

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[4] For a nuanced discussion of a significant segment of Ottoman political relationships, see Faroqhî (1987).

[5] In the following pages readers will miss references to Marina Warner's *Stranger Magic* (2012). Richly illustrated, and worth perusing for that alone, her essays address *Nights* tales as they were from Galland's publication (1704–1717) onward, with all of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century additions and editing which they incorporate. Though broadly based, the essays of *Stranger Magic* do not bear on this exploration of medieval Muslim magic tales.

Even more unexpected is the realization that in both *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, it is not magic that brings about a happy ending here on earth, but an earthly ruler such as the Caliph Harun al-Rashid. Indeed, the idea that felicity (*sa'âda*) can be achieved on earth, not just in heaven, was apparently so small a part of ordinary expectations that it had to be defended in 1692 by a Damascus sheik, 'Abd al-Ghairi al-Nâbulasî (1641–1731), in response to a public attack on that idea by a Turkish interlocutor (Heyberger, 1994: 40). The evident necessity in an Islamic context to outline and defend the possibility of achieving happiness on earth confirms that the notion of a secular happy ending did not automatically form part of the worldview of listeners to or readers of these tales. Such expectations may underlie differing perceptions of supernatural events by characters in medieval Muslim magic tales from those that enable protagonists in fairy tales in the early modern world to manipulate magic.

Tales of the Marvellous

Tales of the Marvellous presents its stories without a unifying frame tale. It is possible that researchers will some day uncover equally ancient story collections, as they comb through manuscript holdings of European, North African, and Middle Eastern libraries. But before the 2010 recognition of *Hundred and One Nights*, *Tales of the Marvellous* was the earliest entry point into Muslim tale collections. The collection was found by a German scholar in the Sophia Library in Istanbul as MS Ayasophya No. 3397. In the years since its discovery, its stories were translated one by one into German by Max Weisweiler, Hans Wehr, Sophia Grotzfeld, and Otto Spies before being brought together and published by the Göttingen Arabist Ulrich Marzolph, who entitled the collection *Das Buch der wundersamen Geschichten. Erzählungen aus der Welt von 1001 Nacht* (The Book of Marvelous Tales: Stories from the World of 1001 Nights).

The manuscript, designated simply *Hikayat* (Stories), was characterized by its compiler as *al-hikayat al-'ajiba wa'l-akhbar al-ghariba* (marvelous tales and strange information (Irwin, 2014: Introduction, *Tales of the Marvellous and News of the Strange*), which its English translator Malcolm Lyons adapted as its title. The manuscript date, its author, and its original place of production have not yet been conclusively identified, although to me its understanding of Egypt as a far-off and fundamentally different place moves its conceptual production to the far northern end of the Levant. Its handwriting style initially suggested a date between 1300 and 1350 CE, which then made *Tales of*

the Marvellous the oldest known popular story collection of the Muslim Middle Ages.

Scholars writing in Arabic preserved much literary and scientific writing from the Mediterranean world, and some of the content of those ancient writings entered *Tales of the Marvellous*. As a whole, however, its center of gravity lies not along the shores of the Mediterranean, but in the interior of the Levant and Iraq. Its 18 extant stories take place in major cities – Baghdad, Basra, and Damascus – as well as in a generalized "Persia" and a far-off Egypt, whose hieroglyphic writings, stone columns, pyramids, and other marvels are worked into several stories. Others are set in the desert, in Khurâsân (today's northern Iran) or in the "Kingdom of Saihûn." Although the Mediterranean appears now and again in its stories, "the sea" in *Tales of the Marvellous* is more often than not a far-off and nameless ocean. Only rarely does a sailor in *Tales of the Marvellous* ply the waters between Byzantium and the Syrian shore, probably because the natural route from there to Baghdad is overland. Overland travel from there to Damascus is equally routine in the stories, presumably to avoid a sea passage made dangerous by piratical attacks from corsairs of all nations.

When Greek tradition emerges in *Tales of the Marvellous*, it is through a Byzantine filter, as with stories of lovers separated and later reunited (Grunebaum, 1963: 376–405), or with a magnetically attracting mountain that mysteriously ensnares passing ships and holds them fast, a trope in magic tales since antiquity (Lecouteux, 1999; Tuczay, 2005: 273–6).

A language of personal obeisance and postures of social abasement, familiar from Egyptian stories like those in Chapter 2, permeate *Tales of the Marvellous*. Both language and posture unquestioningly accept despotic power that is capricious and unrestrained. To acknowledge a superior such as a sultan, caliph, or emir, a *Tales of the Marvellous* character typically kisses the ground in front of that person's feet, putting his lips to the soil or to the street, even when he is himself of noble lineage. The powerlessness of single individuals before their sovereign reflects the way in which they surmount impossible tasks and wretched trials in *Tales of the Marvellous* – not through magic, but through prayer or through a caliph's granting clemency, money, or earthly well-being. Evil-doers and wicked characters conjure maleficent magic; pious Muslims can invoke Allah's vast power through prayer; and lucky ones encounter a beneficent ruler.

Magic in the plots of Tales of the Marvellous

The plots in *Tales of the Marvellous* recount the lives of ordinary humans who experience extraordinary events or who encounter supernatural

forces. Their encounters resemble those in ancient Egyptian magic tales more than they do those told by Ovid about Greece's gods, demi-gods, and humans. "The Story of Abu Muhammad the Idle" (No. 11) is typical:

> Harun al-Rashid, wandering in disguise through Baghdad, sees unmistakable evidence that one of his subjects possesses greater wealth than he. Discomfited, he sends for the man, Abu Muhammad the Idle, who is indeed rich beyond imagining. Harun asks to hear his story, which Abu Muhammad obligingly tells. As a child he was incorrigibly lazy. One day his mother gave him a dirham to invest with a merchant leaving for the Orient, and Abu Muhammad rouses himself to do so. On the return voyage the ship stops stock still, until the merchant, remembering his promise, makes a purchase with Abu Muhammad's dirham – an ape! Before reaching Basra the ape dives into the sea, repeatedly bringing up oysters, each of which contains a priceless pearl, the beginning of Abu Muhammad's fortune. One day the ape begins to speak, reveals that he is a jinn under an enchantment, and expresses a desire to marry the surpassingly beautiful Badr al-Samâ. Abu Muhammad, he says, is to secure her for him by marrying her, but is not to consummate the marriage. But in carrying out the ape's mission, Abu Muhammad falls hopelessly in love with the bride. When the ape appears and carries her off two nights later, Abu Muhammad goes in search of her, finds and frees her, and lives happily ever after on the wealth the ape earlier provided him. Harun likes the story and makes Abu Muhammad one of his boon companions.

This tale foregrounds a classic character and plot in tales told for amusement: a lazy boy, an unanticipated source of immense wealth, a character transformed into an animal, and an ending in which the hero's becoming an intimate associate of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid is a *de facto* achievement of happiness on earth. The *Tales of the Marvellous* author attaches the entire story to a venerable and venerated historical figure, Harun al-Rashid (766–809), and then uses an enchanted ape and the trope of a ship brought unaccountably, i.e. magically in the eyes of its protagonist, to a standstill, to propel the story forward.

The story seems to consist of two disparate tales. The first comprises an honest seafaring captain's transaction (buying an ape for a dirham on Abu Muhammad's behalf) which results in a fortune (a haul of precious pearls) that enriches an undeserving city-based lazybones. This part of the story, improbable though it is, does not contravene any natural law

(it might be possible that an ape be trained to dive for pearls), and is therefore not impossible, and consequently not inherently magical by any standard. The story could have ended with Abu Muhammad's sudden enrichment, and perhaps at some point in its history it did. But in *Tales of the Marvellous* the lazy hero's acquisition of wealth is followed by a second, distinctly impossible, train of events. The ape begins to speak, telling Abu Mohammad that he is a powerful jinn under an enchantment, without specifying either the enchanter or the reason for the enchantment. It is as though the author has haphazardly plucked a magical device from an available repertoire and inserted it into a classic episode in which an emissary or representative takes on the role of the person who sent him and then displaces him.

Another tale, "The Story of Abu Dîsa, Nicknamed the Bird" (No. 9), a type of "Dr Know-It-All" story that is widespread in the Near East, undermines supernatural episodes by satirizing astrologers and astrology. Its ironizing presentation of a character's supernatural knowledge of future events undermines an audience's understanding of the weaver's predictive gifts as a form of magic:

> Urged by his wife, Abu Dîsa, a poor weaver, pretends to be an astrologer. In a gibberish prediction, he tells his first customer, a pregnant woman, that she will bear two children, doing so neither on earth nor in heaven. Inadvertently she gives birth in a treehouse. For his apparent prescience Abu Dîsa is rewarded handsomely by the woman, who is – unbeknownst to him – the king's daughter.
>
> Equally improbable but successful predictions follow. The fearful Abu Dîsa repeatedly tries to flee from his faked profession and from the dire punishments he imagines will follow once he is found out. When his wife berates him, he sputters out comically violent wishes in retribution for her putting him in danger. The king continues to shower him with priceless gifts and Abu Dîsa himself finds opportunities to revenge himself on those who formerly belittled him.

In real life, an ignorant and impoverished weaver whose timidity paralyzes him into despairing inaction would never achieve wealth and distinction, but this timorous little man is blessed with extraordinary luck and endowed with social caginess. The character created by his wife's nagging leads to delightful inversions of every aspect of his miserable life. Illiterate, he pretends to peruse a tattered and notation-filled notebook. Clueless, he predicts precise details about a princess's future

confinement. Terrified, he tries to flee the king, but is instead showered with royal gifts and grace. As a whole, the story spoofs astrologers and, more surprisingly, tweaks the sensibilities of husbands who berate their wives for interference, because it is precisely Abu Dîsa's wife's interfering that precipitates his good fortune. Magic itself is presented as a concept to be exploited among the credulous.

"The Story of the Four Treasure Troves" (No. 4) perfectly exemplifies another story-extending device in *Tales of the Marvellous*, the embedding of one tale after another within a single narrative frame. (This differs from an overall frametale like that in *Thousand and One Nights*, where Shahrazad remains implicitly or explicitly present throughout the entire collection.) In this case the tale's invocation and attribution is followed directly by a frame into which a storyteller named Fadl inserts himself, as he tells of sitting before Emir 'Abd al-Wahhâb on a hot day. The Emir tells Fadl he wants somebody who can tell him a marvelous and unusual story. Fadl replies that among the Emir's prisoners is an educated and clever man who has begged for an audience. Summoned before the Emir and ordered to speak, the prisoner uses proper Arabic, and so the Emir has him bathed, dressed, fed, and brought back. The man agrees to tell a story that the Emir knows in part, perhaps referring to the City of Brass elements (Marzolph, 1999b: 599) that it contains. But in fact he tells *four* stories, one after the other, which include automata, abundant troves of jewels, gold, and silver, and references to Magians. There is also a crown, three of whose jewels have special properties: one causes whoever looks upon it to flee; another blinds the sons of whores; the third inspires awe and reverence for the crown's wearer. The same crown, repeatedly warned against because it is also associated with destructive magical powers, astrological effects, and subterranean marvels, is dangerous. Some of the tale's Christian protagonists convert to Islam as the adventures conclude and join the inner circle of the tale's internal royal listener. Here and in succeeding stories, automata – each an "uncanny accessory" in Robert Irwin's words (1994: 189) – loom large, literally and literarily, while a brass lion kills a feckless intruder with his steel teeth, and brass hands grasp the feet of the treasure seekers. Against these mechanical impediments, the treasure seekers are helped along their way by a supernatural who comes to their aid whenever they call out "Mubashshir!" Like the first three stories, the fourth chronicles awed encounters with cultural otherness, such as the pagan idols positioned to guard immense hoards of underground wealth, a narrative echo, perhaps, of the long tradition of "marvels of Egypt" books, like that of the early thirteenth-century Jamâl al-dîn al-Idrîsî (Haarmann, 1980: 59–61).

The individual stories in *Tales of the Marvellous* conclude as they begin, with a formulaic acknowledgement of God's greatness: "Praise be to God and may blessings and salvation accrue to Mohammed, his family, and his friends" (No. 10), or "Let us beg God for forgiveness and well-being and everlasting health and for his grace, when he takes our lives from us" (No. 7), or very briefly, "That's the end of the story. And God knows it all better" (No. 9). Or even "This is the whole and complete story, and God bless our Lord Mohammad, his family, and his companions and grant them salvation" (No. 12).[6] No two narrative closures are precisely the same in *Tales of the Marvellous*, but all return to and acknowledge God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

Religion and magic in Tales of the Marvellous

Before the seventh-century emergence of Islam, pagan idols dotted the Near Eastern landscape and its inhabitants followed animist rites. Even though seven or more centuries passed between Muhammad's day and the time at which an unknown scribe compiled *Tales of the Marvellous*, pagan idols still function narratively by providing a pre-Islamic backdrop in some tales. In addition to those in "The Four Treasure Troves" (No. 4), idols are part of "The Story of the Talisman Mountain" (No. 17) and of "Abu Muhammad the Idle" (No. 11), while there are 10,000 of them in a huge temple in "The Story of Sa'îd Son of Hâtim al-Bâhilî" (No. 14). In the Muslim storytelling context in which this collection was composed or compiled, such idols can be dangerous, but are meant to be regarded as impotent relics of the pre-Islamic past. They can be fooled or gotten around (No. 4), or they all fall down when Sa'id reads aloud from the *Qur'an*, an instance of the efficacious use of sacred language, whose effect parallels that of incantational magic in narratives conceived within a secular narrative environment.

The narrative logic of *Tales of the Marvellous* also fits neatly within Islam. Since God is the author of all magic (once pagan deities have been disposed of), prayer is an effective means of bringing about restitution that is otherwise inexplicable according to laws of nature: poor Prince Kaukab, footless and handless, the rejected son of the King of Two Rivers, lies thirsting in the desert, until he addresses a lengthy prayer to God and beats his head bloody against the desert floor. After his beloved and her mother join him in these fervent acts, a divine

[6] These are my translations from the German of *Das Buch der Wundersamen Geschichten*, which may therefore differ from the Lyons renderings in *Tales of the Marvellous*.

herald appears and announces that Prince Kaukab's missing body parts have been restored (No.1). Is this magic? Or is it a demonstration of a belief in God's illimitable powers?

Volition and magic in Tales of the Marvellous

In religious terms, humans' powerlessness stems from their nothingness before an almighty Divinity. If God alone is responsible for everything that happens, human intention remains of minimal significance. And indeed, this assumption underlies all narratives in *Tales of the Marvellous*, and consequently its characters' motivations are not explored. Furthermore, the basic tenet that God controls all events and eventualities leads to the expectation that magic cannot be directed by human beings or even be under human control. Perhaps this is the reason that magic and enchantment, as it would be implemented in eighteenth-century additions to the *Thousand and One Nights* in tales such as "Aladdin," remain alien to *Tales of the Marvellous*. Within a mindset governed by the premise that magic is not and cannot be under human control, explorations of human motivations vis-à-vis magic become irrelevant.

Beginning in the first story of *Tales of the Marvellous* and continuing through the remaining stories, statements of an individual's powerlessness to direct his own fate abound, and all are variations on the premise that only God the Powerful has the capacity to direct one's life. Thus, in every story God's singular omnipotence explains the course of events and is emphasized well beyond anything that can be found in contemporaneous European stories. In medieval Christian narratives the Virgin Mary as well as numberless saints are assumed to have effective intercessory powers as well as independent spheres of influence, all of which diminishes the sense of God's omnipotence. In post-Reformation Protestant Europe, wherever Rome's company of saints was abandoned, a monotheistic omnipotence similar to that expressed in *Tales of the Marvellous* returns, but always tempered by the problematic question of free will. Within Muslim theology, that conundrum produces a narrative rhetoric of unquestioning acceptance of God's will in Muslim magic tales.

Situational response is the quintessential opposite of both individual character and independent volition. Volition expresses character, but since individual powerlessness permeates the stories in *Tales of the Marvellous,* character definition is in short supply. This is also true of most contemporaneous European brief narratives, but for a different reason: *their* brevity results from the excision of everything irrelevant to the brief plot's forward motion.

"I hear and obey," the most common expression of acquiescence and compliance, is more than an empty formula. Occasional variations, such as "I hear and perform thousand fold obeisance" or something similar in "The Story of Julanar of the Sea" (No. 6), alter the formula. Such phrasing confirms underlying sentiments of acquiescence and obedience and expresses human powerlessness not only in the face of divine omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence, but also vis-à-vis anyone higher in a social and political hierarchy.

Statements of powerlessness permeate plots, like that of "The Story of the King of the Two Rivers" (No. 1), whose characters respond to the threat of an approaching monster by falling on their faces and trying appeasement by sacrificing one of their group to it. When the men finally decide to resist, their useless initiative produces carnage, as the monster sinks their ship and eats the floundering sailors. In the third story told within "The Story of the Four Treasure Troves" (No. 4), the hero sees a tent in flames with thick smoke pouring out of it and stares at the scene uncomprehending and unresponsive. He might be excused for his inaction, except that his lack of volition later becomes painfully evident when he hears a voice tell him to "Go back" and he obeys, only to remain waiting all day to see what the command might have to do with him.

Fantasy turns to abject fear in "The Story of 'Arûs al-Arâis and her Deceit" (No. 7), whose tale is one of destructive female rage:

> At her birth, it is foretold that she will bring death and destruction throughout her life. She kills the astrologers who predict disasters, a youth along with 100 of his friends, 100 virgin daughters of foreign viziers, her own father, and all of the high officials of his realm . . . 'Arûs al-Arâis uses sexual attraction to draw one man after another into thrall – the catalog is endless.

The story is then retold from her point of view:

> Captured by a demon, she is freed by a handsome youth, to whom she remains faithful. But when she finds her lover missing his nose, ears, lips, penis, and testicles (signs of punishment for sexual misconduct), she sends a demon to kill him. Failing in this, she has him imprisoned for allegedly raping his mother, telling him that if he ever leaves prison, she will attack him unmercifully and kill him. After her death, he goes free, but in a devilishly clever ruse, she posthumously causes his death.

Magic in *Tales of the Marvellous* is elusive. Behind, and perhaps steering its composition, lurks an appetite for magic, but the wished-for magic expresses itself within confining constraints.

The medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*

The date commonly assigned to the collection that the modern world knows as *The Arabian Nights* is as ancient as a few thousand or as recent as a few hundred years ago, depending on a researcher's inclination and approach. What is known as fact is that around 750 CE a collection of stories called *Hazâr Afsân* (Thousand Adventures) was translated from Persian into Arabic, a dating derived from a notation made around 850 CE by 'Abdallâh Ibn 'Abdal'aziz (Irwin, 1994: 48–51; Chraïbi, 2008: 24–6; Grotzfeld, 2012: 20). The general surmise that a collection of stories with "thousand" in its title existed in the early centuries of Islam was turned into a roughly datable fact by a paper fragment found in the mid-twentieth century. Dated to the 800s CE, it bears parts of the title page and the first page of a familiar text that continued to open manuscripts of *Alf Layla* for centuries (Abbott, 1949: 133). Not only does this ancient scrap of paper confirm the early medieval existence of the collection in Arabic, it also suggests that the collection itself was highly valued, since it had been written on paper, which at that time was more expensive than papyrus (Abbott, cited in Grotzfeld 2012: 17–19).

The collection's history continues in the mid-900s, when the well-traveled encyclopedist, Mas'ûdî famously described and characterized the book that people were calling *Alf Layla* (Thousand Nights). It was, in his words, "the story of the king, the vizier, and his daughter and her servant, and they are Šrizâd and Dinâzad," and was "like Farza and Šîmâs's book with its stories about the kings of India and the[ir] Viziers, or like the book of Sindîbad or other books of this kind" (Grotzfeld 2012: 20–1). Just 30 years after Mas'ûdî's death, the bookseller Muhammad Ibn Ishâq al-Nadîm listed *Alf Layla* in far-off Baghdad in his *Fihrist* (Catalog), classing it as the kind of book that would be recorded for royal libraries. The tenth-century *Fihrist* presents the first account of the daily threat of an impending execution, the frametale drama that drives Shahrazad's storytelling. It also adverts to the kinds of stories *Alf Layla* contains – adventures, fables with talking animals, wisdom tales like "Sindibâd the Wise," but doesn't list individual tales by title. Later chroniclers of literary taste would note additional genres (like romances of unhappy love) to their description of the contents of the book now called *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (Thousand Nights and One Night, or in scholarly parlance, Thousand and One Nights). We do not

know if such notations mean that the book's corpus was in the process of steadily expanding in the medieval period, but it seems likely.

Despite *Alf Layla wa-Layla*'s apparently wide geographical currency – from Cairo to Baghdad –only a few notations of its existence have turned up: those mentioned above and a twelfth-century scrap of paper recording that an *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscript had been lent out, serendipitously found in the Cairo Geniza, a Jewish repository for sacred discards (Goitein, 1958). Since no copy of the collection itself survives from that period, an analysis of magic in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* effectively begins with the oldest extant text, a three-volume Syrian manuscript now in the French *Bibliothèque Nationale*. Although both its editor Muhsin Mahdi and its translator into English, Husain Haddawy, dated *Alf Layla wa-Layla* to the fourteenth century, two dates within the manuscript itself place it, at the outside, between 1428 and 1536. 1428 CE was the year in which the Egyptian Mamluk ruler Ashraf introduced a gold coin, the ashrafi *dinar,* to displace the Venetian ducat as a unit of currency in the Egyptian Mamluk-governed Levant. The Hunchback cycle mentions this coin on Night 133, and Heinz Grotzfeld has suggested that the manuscript's earliest date may fall somewhat later, because considerable time may have passed before the ashrafi *dinar* became familiar enough to have been used to denominate a merchant's rent without further explanation, as it is in Night 133. The second date is 1536 CE, the equivalent of the "943" date of acquisition (or ownership) penned onto the manuscript itself by its owner (Grotzfeld, 2012: 32).[7] This is not to say that the stories themselves in the Syrian *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscript date from the period between 1428 and 1536, but that this manuscript presents *renderings* of these stories from some point between 1428 and 1536. In 2013 Jean-Claude Garçín, noting an event mentioned in a French romance, *Pierre de Provence,* concluded that the Syrian manuscript could not have been produced before 1443 (2013: 193–4), a suggestion reminding us that writers and tellers incorporate their understanding and experience of the world into each (re)writing or telling of a tale, as, for instance, this manuscript's scribe did by incorporating the previously nonexistent but subsequently dominant ashrafi *dinar* to designate the currency with which a young man paid rent

[7] A large secondary literature assumes an oral creation and/or transmission of *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, for instance El-Shamy, 1990: 63–117. My discussion assumes a written tradition as demonstrated by Hameed Hawwas in "A Prologue Tale as Manifesto Tale: Establishing a Narrative Literary Form and the Formation of *Arabian Nights*" (2007: 65–77).

to live in the house of Sudun 'Abd al-Rahman in Damascus (*Arabian Nights*, 1990: 291).[8]

Beyond the "when" of the late medieval Syrian *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscript lies a "who," namely the nationality or ethnicity or identity of the manuscript's scribe. Garçín conjectures a Damascus identity from the ways in which locations are characterized in Cairo and Damascus, supporting a Damascus identity by concluding that the manuscript was written by someone with a book-based knowledge of Cairo and its architecture, but with a personal acquaintance with the urban geography of markets and city gateways in Damascus (2013: 194–8).

The fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries saw a proliferation – and survival – of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscripts (Marzolph, 2006: 179–81), but the manuscript brought to prominence by Antoine Galland's use of it for his early eighteenth-century translation (published as *Mille et Une Nuit* in 12 volumes between 1704 and 1717) is the oldest one. It must be borne in mind that the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* differs in fundamental ways from the *Arabian Nights*. (I again remind readers that I use "*Alf Layla wa-Layla*" (Thousand nights and one night) for the Arabic manuscript discussed here; "*Mille et Une Nuit*" for the translated, edited, and expanded collection composed by Antoine Galland; "*Arabian Nights*" for the specifically western tradition that grew from Galland's version; and "*Thousand and One Nights*" for the corpus as a whole that now exists in canonical Arabic-language collections.) Not only did Galland adjust occasional raw episodes for his contemporaries' sensibilities in *Mille et Une Nuit*, he also introduced Sindbad the Sailor's adventurous voyages, and added seven tales, some of which were entirely new to Arabic narrative tradition (Bottigheimer, 2014). The new tales came from a Syrian Christian young man in his twenties named Hannâ Diyâb, who was visiting Paris in 1709, after having worked for years in the offices of French merchants in Aleppo, and these tales included the now iconic "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves." The poverty-stricken urchin Aladdin rubs a brass lamp, which draws forth a powerful genie, while Hannâ Diyâb's humble Ali Baba and the highwaymen robbers use "Open Sesame" and "Close Sesame" for their entries into and exits from a gold-filled cave. That is, in Hannâ Diyâb's tales a poor boy and poor men respectively use magic unwittingly or wittingly and thereby improve their lot in life. Magic manipulated by the poor was familiar from European fairy tales from

[8] Note that Haddawy renders the Arabic as simply "two dinars," omitting the word *ashrafi*, which appears in the Arabic manuscript.

the mid-sixteenth-century onward, but played no role in the magic evident either in *Tales of the Marvellous* or in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, whose corpus "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba" wouldn't join for another two centuries. Indeed, magical or supernatural powers in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* that alter the course of a person's life never emerge at the behest of poor people, and are, moreover, separate from achieving material wealth or a happily-ever-after ending. In the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, both the terms and the categories of magic differ from those in modern fairy tales of European origin.

Impossibilities and improbabilities

What characters in the late medieval Syrian *Alf Layla wa-Layla* seem to consider magical, what amazes those characters, what affects their perceptions so powerfully that they swoon, often differs from that which causes the same kinds of reactions in characters in contemporaneous western fictions. Medieval European writers subscribed to distinctions that Giovanni Boccaccio had established with reference to degrees of truth and these came to characterize broadly acknowledged genre differences between novellas and fairy tales, namely "improbable" happenstances in novellas versus "impossible" ones in magic tales, and later in fairy tales (Magnanini, 2012: 15–21). In composing a novella, European writers might stretch the boundaries of the improbable by creating theoretically possible situations that were nonetheless unlikely in the extreme. For instance, siblings separated at birth might be shipwrecked on separate vessels and be cast up on the same remote island. No natural law prohibits this course of events, improbable though it is. However, that two siblings separated at birth and shipwrecked on separate vessels should escape death by being changed into birds that fly to a desert island is impossible. No law of nature enables a transformation of human beings into animal beings.

We have inched into the realm of impossibilities, of which the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* contains many. In "The Tale of the King's Son and the She-Ghoul" (Haddawy, 1990: 56–7) it is patently impossible that Duban's severed head can speak. Nonetheless, that episode is not presented as magic, but as a manifestation of Duban's great learning and control over nature. Neither is it possible that a prince could survive the transformation of the lower half of his body into black stone in the same story (ibid.: 67). And it similarly lies beyond the realm of possibility that a demon should sprinkle a prince with dust to turn him into an ape possessed of extraordinary calligraphic skills ("The Tale of the Second Dervish," ibid.: 126–8). More often than not, impossibilities like these

are simply accepted within the tale itself as a narrative given, while gross improbabilities routinely elicit "amazement." These responses, perplexing to a modern reader, suggest theological constraints of the following sort. If it is axiomatic that magic resides within God's power alone, then expressing surprise at magical overturnings of natural law would imply that the person expressing surprise does not fully accept God's omnipotence, assertions of which permeate these magic tales. It would follow that the doubt connoted by surprise at an impossibility would taint a character with (heretical) reservations concerning God's powers. With reference to the concept of God's exclusive control over magic, these Muslim magic tales are at one end of a belief spectrum. Jewish demon tales are overall ambivalent on this question. In theory, Christian theology similarly positions God at the apex of wielding magic powers, but in magic tales themselves, a range of figures (Satan, demons, sorcerers, witches, angels, saints, Mary, Jesus, and God) can access and manipulate supernatural powers.

In the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* manuscript, characters' reactions within the tales show that "improbable" and "impossible" often bleed into one another. For instance, improbable abundance "dazzles" the "astonished" girl who tells the Caliph of Baghdad that she "marvels" at seeing

> "a crown studded with all kinds of gems, and the apartment . . . spread with silk tapestries embroidered with gold . . . an ivory bed plated with burnished gold, set with two bosses of green emeralds, and draped with a canopylike net strung with pearls . . . a gem as big as an ostrich egg, with an incandescent glow . . . " ("The Tale of the First Lady," ibid.: 165)

Similarly Abu al-Hasan "marvels" at the abundance of fine food in the caliph's palace: "suckling lambs, fatted chickens, and other birds, such as grouse, quail, and pigeons, the jar full of assorted pickles, and all the candies" ("The Story of Nur al-Din Ali ibn-Bakkar and the Slave-Girl," ibid.: 359). And in "The Story of the Two Viziers" Badr al-Din Hasan, even though he was born and grew up the son of the Vizier of the King of Egypt and himself became the Vizier of Basra, is "staggered" when he sees his cousin decked in

> "robes and jewelry worthy of the Persian kings. She paraded in a robe embroidered in gold with dazzling figures of all kinds of birds and beasts, with eyes and bills of precious stones and feet of rubies

> and green beryl. She wore a very rare and precious necklace set with large, round gems that dazzled the eye and staggered the mind." (Ibid.: 209–10)

These are all reactions that modern readers would expect to be reserved for the magically impossible, but here they greet material splendor.

Improbabilities and impossibilities mix in a clever tale about a husband who buys a parrot to report on his wife's behavior when he leaves home. After the parrot reveals the wife's infidelities in persuasive detail, she orchestrates a *son et lumière* that makes the parrot undermine his own credibility by telling the husband about an apparently violent, but actually nonexistent thunder and lightning storm, thus releasing (temporarily at least) the wife from suspicion (ibid.: 50). That a parrot can report on a merchant's wife's infidelity in acceptably grammatical and comprehensible Arabic is not presented as magic or as an impossibility within the tale itself. Neither is it considered magical that a merchant understands the language of birds and animals in the collection's "Prologue," where Shahrazad's father tells her "The Tale of the Ox and the Donkey" and "The Tale of the Merchant and His Wife" (ibid.: 15–17, 18–20). Perhaps the long-standing Aesopic, *Panchatantra*, and *Kalila wa-Dimna* animal-told wisdom tales predisposed medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* readers and listeners to accept speaking animals and talking birds as natural, or at least, not as unnatural or supernatural. Even the transformation of evil-doers into animals is not presented as astonishing in "The Story of the Merchant and the Demon" (ibid.: 21–36). We must therefore wrestle with the conditions and events that dazzle the eye, stagger the imagination, amaze, or cause characters to swoon in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, as well as with what is treated as commonplace in its text.

"The Story of the Two Viziers" mixes improbabilities with impossibilities on a different level from that in "The Husband and The Parrot." A he-demon flying high above the earth meets a she-demon, to whom he shows the extraordinarily handsome Badr al-Din Hasan al-Basri. In an improbable coincidence, the she-demon has just witnessed the beauty of Badr al-Din Hasan's foreordained wife, his Egyptian cousin Sit al-Husn. In a further improbability, these two individuals, a male and a female, have each encountered, in locations far distant from one another, precisely those two individuals foreordained (since the tale's opening pages) to marry one another, and in a third improbability the two arrive at the same location at precisely the same moment. Expressed in these terms, such collective improbabilities pass the test for a highly unlikely, but nonetheless possible, event. However, the fact that two

individuals who encounter one another are demons, and that each is flying high above the earth when they meet, makes their aerial encounter an impossibility, which is either the product of magical thinking or else the product of accepted *Alf Layla wa-Layla* literary conventions. In neither case does the mix of improbability and impossibility correspond to anything in the European imaginary of the same period. Thus we do well to closely examine both "The Story of the Two Viziers" and its companion tale, "The Three Apples." In the latter tale,

> Harun al-Rashid has ordered his vizier Ja'fur to find and execute the person who caused the death of a beautiful and virtuous married woman. Learning that his own slave had set the fatal events in train, and seeing "that the caliph was greatly struck by the coincidences of the story, Ja'far offers to tell a marvelous and even more amazing story if Harun will pardon his slave. ("The Three Apples," ibid.: 188)

Thus the words that frame the telling of "The Story of the Two Viziers" lay out the narrative conditions, namely, improbable "coincidences" meant to "amaze" the caliph, and by extension, readers of and listeners to the following story:

> Two brothers, co-viziers of the king of Egypt, dream about a future in which they will simultaneously draw up marriage contracts and conceive children who will marry each other. They fall out irreconcilably when they disagree about the dowry involved for the wedding of the not yet conceived offspring. The younger brother quits Cairo, journeys to Basra, meets its vizier, marries his daughter, inherits his goods and position, and sires a son gifted with perfections of body and mind. His brother, who remains in Cairo as vizier to the king of Egypt, likewise marries and has a child of surpassing beauty and charm, a daughter.
>
> At his father's death, the young Badr al-Din Hasan mourns so unrelentingly that the King of Basra determines to destroy him, but forewarned, Badr al-Din Hasan flees to his father's grave and falls into a deep and exhausted sleep. The he-demon comes upon him and is so amazed at his beauty that he and the she-demon carry him to Cairo to displace the hunchback the king of Egypt has chosen for Sit al-Husn's husband. Within moments Badr al-Din Hasan awakens in Cairo, is sent to the baths, and is instructed to enter the wedding hall with candlebearers and to shower Sit al-Husn's women with gold coins from an inexhaustible supply in his pocket. When the

hunchback goes to the privy, the he-demon terrifies him first as a black tomcat, then as a braying ass, and finally as a mammoth buffalo, before upending him in the well-filled toilet, thus freeing Badr al-Din Hasan to take Sit al-Husn's virginity and make her pregnant. Before dawn Badr al-Din Hasan is carried to Damascus where he awakens pantsless and surrounded by a skeptical crowd, to whom he tries to explain that he was in Basra the day before, went to bed in Cairo, and now awakens in Damascus. The crowd concludes that he is "mad" and tells him to "return to his senses," spelling out the impossibility of the episode he describes. Pursued by the crowd, he takes refuge in a cookshop, is adopted by its owner, and takes up this humble trade.

Twelve years later, his uncle the Egyptian vizier, his daughter, and her (and Badr al-Din Hasan's) son set out in search of the man who wedded and left his daughter. In Damascus the son, 'Ajib, enters the cookshop, but when Badr al-Din is drawn to him by his blood tie and follows him back to his encampment, 'Ajib drives him off.

Eventually the vizier realizes that the cookshop cook may be his nephew, that is, his daughter's husband, and his grandson's father. He sets up an elaborate ruse to test his identity which turns on a special pomegranate dish that Badr al-Din Hasan prepares. All ends happily when Badr al-Din Hasan is joyfully reunited with his wife Sit al-Husn.

Jaf'ar's story "amazes" the caliph "exceedingly," who orders it to be recorded. He not only pardons Jaf'ar's slave, but rewards him with a "choice concubine" and a "sufficient income" and makes him "one of his companions to the end of his days" (ibid.: 248).

"The Story of the Two Viziers" touches on a number of recurrent *Alf Layla wa-Layla* themes. Improbability, thematized throughout the narration, is repeatedly associated with the intrinsically theological concept of predestination, in the sense of having been foreordained by an all-powerful all-knowing God. For instance, the text notes that Badr al-Din Hasan's son 'Ajib stopped in front of his father's cookshop "as if it had been foreordained" (ibid.: 227). What is foreordained, by definition, expresses divine omniscience, rather than the exercise of magic. Hence, "God" repeatedly recurs in "The Story of the Two Viziers." On the other hand, the magic that is experienced in "The Story of the Two Viziers" – Badr al-Din Hasan's instantaneous transport from Basra to Cairo to Damascus and the hunchback's bodily experience of the demon's fearsome animal transformations, both very real to the men

involved – are marked not as magic but as evidence of madness on the part of the two men who claim to have experienced these events. The hunchback feels constrained to deny that he is mad as he reports his horrendous encounters, and the crowd surrounding Badr al-Din Hasan accuses him of the same malady. The hunchback's experience of magic deprives him of a beautiful wife, while Badr al-Din Hasan's brings 12 years of hard labor that close with painful physical and intense psychological suffering. Here, and in general in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, impossibilities and improbabilities with advantageous outcomes are attributed to God's intervention in human affairs, even if they are sometimes effected by demons, whereas those with dire outcomes are consigned in the text to demonic malevolence and malicious sorcery.

Magicians and magic in Alf Layla wa-Layla

Of all the tales in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, "The Story of Jullanar of the Sea" has the greatest density of instantaneously transformational magic and formidably powerful magicians, and as such provides illuminating examples of magic in the *Alf Layla wa-Layla* imaginary. The tale begins with a long-awaited-son narrative, continues with the grown son's adventures with two enchantresses, and concludes with a happy ending:

> A Persian king, admirable in every respect, is not blessed with a son until he buys a beautiful but silent girl, with whom he falls in love. A year later she yields to his pleas that she speak, and tells him that she is with child and that she is Jullanar, daughter of a sea-king. She wishes her family to visit, both to assist at the birth and to prove that she is indeed royal. The king assents and she calls them forth. A month later a boy, Badr, is born.
>
> The child grows up learning chivalric skills, becomes king, and rules justly and wisely until he hears of the perfections of Princess Jauhara. Her arrogant father, King al-Shamandal, refuses the suit brought on Badr's behalf, and his army attacks Badr's forces. However, his own army is overwhelmed, and he himself is taken prisoner.
>
> Princess Jauhara takes refuge on an island. When Badr arrives at the same island, they meet and recognize each other, but with opposite intentions: Badr wishes to marry her; she, wishing to destroy him, transforms him into a white bird with red legs and beak. Subsequently snared by a bird-catcher and presented to a king, Badr-as-bird is eventually recognized as a human being by the king's wife, disenchanted, and provided with ship, sailors and supplies to carry him home.

Homeward bound, the ship founders off the City of Magicians, Badr alone surviving. A fava bean seller named Abu Abd 'Allah shelters him and warns him in vain against the wiles of the Magian sorceress, Queen Lab. Bewitched by her beauty, Badr enjoys forty blissful days of carnal delight before observing her with another lover. He seeks out the fava bean seller, who provides magic barley meal, by means of which Badr turns her into a she-mule. Shortly thereafter Queen Lab's mother manages to disenchant her daughter, summon a demon, and carry herself, Queen Lab, and Badr back to the palace in the City of Magicians, where Badr is transformed into an ugly bird, caged, and deprived of food and water. His mother Jullanar, his grandmother Farasha, and his uncle Sayih summon "all the tribes of demons and the troops of the sea" (515) to destroy the City of Magicians and its inhabitants and then change Badr back into a man.

Badr still wishes to marry Princess Jauhara, who assents when her father, now humbled, gives his permission. "Then King Badr and his wife and mother and relatives continued to enjoy life until they were overtaken by the breaker of ties and destroyer of delights" (518).

A long-ish story, "Jullanar of the Sea" lasts from Night 230 to Night 271 in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, but even though characters with supernatural powers abound, the author introduces them as such only from Night 256 onward, more than halfway through the story. The first to be explicitly credited with magical powers is a king's wife, "the greatest sorceress of her day" (499), who recognizes King Badr in the guise of the white bird. Soon thereafter the dangerous Queen Lab appears, an "enchantress who is as enchanting as the moon" (501) and who has a devouring sexual appetite for handsome men (502). One day, a thousand mounted officers, a thousand Mamluks, and a thousand moon-beautiful girls herald the arrival of the beguiling queen, behind whose bewitching beauty, the text tells us, she is "blasphemous" (502, 505), a "cursed witch" (506), a "cursed woman" (510, 513), a "fire worshiper" (510), and above all, an "infidel" (505, 510, 512). Nonetheless, Badr is ready to relinquish his empire, abandon his mother, and give up his human form in return for 40 nights in bed with her (506), and indeed Badr experiences 40 days and nights of delightful "kissing and playing" (508).

Queen Lab's mother, an old woman whom Badr treats respectfully, makes only a brief appearance (514–15), unlike Jullanar's mother Farasha, who is introduced into the story on Night 236. "[D]escended from the daughters of the sea" (471), she joins Jullanar a month before

Badr's birth as "a gray-haired old woman" (473) who subsequently shows herself to be politically and tactically savvy (487, 488) and militarily prescient (491). Despite her many appearances in the story, only near the end of the tale does the author tell us that "Jullanar of the Sea and her mother Farasha . . . are the most powerful magicians on the face of the earth" (515), which they and Jullanar's brother Sayih explicitly demonstrate by mobilizing the tribes of demons and the troops of the sea (515) to release Badr from Queen Lab's captivity.

Extraordinary powers are attributed to all members of Jullanar's family from the moment that she describes their ability to "walk in water just as you people walk on land, without being wetted or hurt by the water" (472, 473), powers that their subsequent ability to fly and their flaming mouths confirm (474, 475, 476, 478). Princess Jauhara, the legendary beauty who precipitates Badr into his adventures, also has magic powers. In her case, however, the tale's author has nothing to say about public estimates of her abilities or about her personal qualifications, but lets someone who dislikes her characterize her, unjustly, as a "harlot" (499).

Named male magicians are few in "Jullanar of the Sea." Jullanar's brother Sayih, whose supernatural abilities and characteristics (living unharmed under the sea and producing flames from his mouth when angry) express his belonging to a parallel, watery world, but neither living underwater nor mouthing flames functions narratively. The fava bean seller Abu 'Abd-Allah, like Jullanar's mother, is part of the story from the time of Badr's shipwreck. Tasked with catching and delivering handsome young men to Queen Lab (503–4), he remains an active presence in "Jullanar of the Sea" until he shares in the story's happy ending, but only on Night 266 does he describe himself as someone at the top of his profession, when he claims there is "none better skilled in magic than I." He immediately qualifies his status by adding that he doesn't use magic "except when I have to" (510), yet he does so without hesitation when Badr needs help.

Badr himself may be credited with having inherited supernatural abilities from his mother, but in the course of "The Story of Jullanar of the Sea" he functions more often as a channel for magic provided by others. That is to say, he wears "a seal ring engraved with one of the names of the Almighty God" that will protect him "from the whales and other beasts of the sea" (482), and in combatting Queen Lab's supernatural powers he protects himself with the barley meal given him by the fava bean seller (512), although he does manage to produce a conjuration of his own devising (513).

The Magians who inhabit the City of Magicians are referred to as wicked, since they are fire worshipers like Queen Lab (510), but individually and as a group they remain unnamed. Angels also form part of the world of supernaturals in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, but their few appearances are often puzzling. For instance, for no apparent reason one angel uses shooting stars to kill the he-demon in "The Story of the Two Viziers," as he and his companion she-demon are trying to carry Badr al-Din Hasan back to the cemetery in Basra where his experience of magic began (217). The only logical function of this episode is to demonstrate that angels rank higher than demons in the hierarchy of supernaturals. On the other hand, one demon at least claims to have frightened and defied the prophet Solomon (41), thus establishing himself above the Biblical and Qur'anic paragon of wisdom.

Demons are by far the largest number of nameless supernatural beings in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. In the opening story, a demon demands the life of a merchant, whom he accuses of having killed his son with a thoughtlessly tossed date pit ("The Story of the Merchant and the Demon," 22).[9] In succeeding stories like "The Tale of the Envious and the Envied," a demon saves an envied man from death in a well (123) and later appears in the shape of a lion (132). In the same story a king's daughter who has been taught by "a wily and treacherous old woman who was a witch" battles epically against a demon (131, 132–3), and in "The Story of the Two Viziers," a helpful he-demon changes himself into a series of terrifying apparitions.

Demons in these Muslim magic tales share with demons in Jewish magic tales a capacity to effect wickedness as well as goodness. Singly and in troops, they fly through "Jullanar of the Sea," abetting evil when conjured by Queen Lab's mother to carry her, her daughter, and King Badr back to the City of Magicians and combatting evil when they are summoned to attack and destroy the City of Magicians and its inhabitants (515–16). Demons and their powers are transferrable assets: many of the demon troops who follow Jullanar and her mother at the end of the story had earlier owed allegiance to the now-vanquished King al-Shamandal (517).

The array of positions and powers attributed to "demons" brings into high relief one consequence of working with a text in translation. The "demons" of the Haddawy translation obscure differently named

[9] This story is an archetypal *khurâfa,* defined in the late tenth-century *Fihrist* as a "pleasant and strange fictitious story" and later as a "ridiculously impossible stor[y]" (Macdonald, 1924: 371).

populations of supernaturals in the Syrian manuscript. The black pillar of smoke emerging from the sea witnessed by Shahriyar and Shahzaman in the prolog resolves into a "demon" in his English translation, but into an "*ifrit*" in Ott's German (17–19), while the monster who threatens the merchant with death in the opening story (Night 1) is a "demon" in Haddawy, but a "*dschinni*" (jinni) in Ott (31), whom the terrified merchant addresses as "*O böser Dämon*" (O evil demon, 34). Does the distinction between the author's "jinni" and the merchant's "demon" tell us that the merchant doesn't know the difference between the two? Or is it *in*significant, as is the disagreement between a tale's superscript and running head "*Der Fischer und der Dschinni*" (The Fisherman and the Jinni, 49) and its content, where a gigantic *ifrit* and not a *dschinni* appears (53). Its insignificance lies in the fact that Ott's tale title (Jinni) translates Muhsin Mahdi's insertion of a tale title into his critical edition and is thus a piece of information alien to the Syrian manuscript, where no such tale title exists. Bearing these waylaying clues in mind, I acknowledge that my effort to untangle characters' perceptions of supernaturals in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* remains incomplete.

Even when demonic powers meet and are vanquished by witch-taught skills, God remains the ultimate judge, arbiter, and director of narrative events in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. Consider the battle cry, "There is no power and no strength save in God, the Almighty, the Magnificent," uttered when a king's daughter seems to falter in her battle against a flaming demon. When she follows that article of faith with "God is great, God is great! He has conquered and triumphed; He has defeated the infidel," the demon turns to ashes. A final invocation of divine powers, "In the name of the Almighty God and His covenant, be yourself again," restores stone to human flesh.

Social and religious convention provides part or all of these cries, but repetitive expression seems to endow the formulaically expressed articles of faith with imagined powers of causation. Thus, here and in other places in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* simple statements of faith affect the course of action. As expressions of a shared belief in God's omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence, they reinforce the convention that no explanation is required when God's supernatural power turns an entire city and its inhabitants to stone for not abandoning fire worship in favor of worship of "the Merciful God" (167–8). A divine omnipotence that supervenes within the arena of magic effects is a widely shared vision: a divinity's powers on the field where competitors gain (or prove) their dominance by demonstrating superior supernatural powers are similar, even much the same, whether derived

from the Jewish Yahweh (Chapter 3), the Christian Mary (Chapter 4), or the Muslim God.[10]

The magic performed by the supernatural characters in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* takes many forms. Some supernaturals can fly, as do demons in general and Jullanar's sea people in particular. In a motif that turns up in accounts by fifteenth-century pilgrims to the Holy Land and that became widespread in early modern European popular tales, an inexhaustible source of gold coins is made available to a hero by a friendly demon ("The Story of the Two Viziers"). However, the single most frequent result of magicians', witches', and sorcerers' magic is the purposeful transformation of human beings into and out of animal shapes, therianthropy, to use the specialist term. The first tale cycle in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, "The Merchant and the Demon," frames an account of a jealous wife's transformation of her husband's son by his mistress into a young bull, in the expectation that he will shortly be slaughtered. She herself is turned into a deer by a young soothsayer "in order to control her and guard against her evil power" ("The First Old Man's Tale," 30). The transformation of perfidious sisters into dogs punishes their apparent misdeeds ("The Tale of the First Lady," 170). Their transformation back into human beings recognizes, acknowledges, and forgives the spells that were cast on them before their transgressions (181). The he-demon's transformation into cat, mule, and buffalo successfully intimidates the hapless hunchback in "The Story of the Two Viziers" (214); Jauhara transforms Badr into a bird as punishment for deposing her father ("The Story of Jullanar of the Sea," 493); while Queen Lab transforms herself into a white bird to make love with a Mamluk whom she has earlier transformed into a black bird (ibid., 509) and also transforms Badr into an ugly bird when her love for him turns to hatred (ibid., 510–13).

When a character's identity is disguised by a magical transformation into an animal, a corresponding magical ability to uncover inward

[10] It is important to emphasize that poor people do not manipulate magic in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. There is no Aladdin figure here. In "The Story of the Fisherman and the Demon," the poor fisherman counters a demon's argument with reason, and quick-wittedly tricks him back into the brass jar from which he has escaped; the fava bean seller in "Jullanar of the Sea," reputed to be the most powerful of magicians, dispatches a demon to carry messages for him, but performs no magic on the page. The author's apparent reticence about showing the fava bean seller in action may stem from unstated but far-reaching class constraints on the practice of magic. These observations form part of a larger argument that will be made elsewhere about caliphs and the conferral of riches, a characteristic component of happy endings in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*.

identity usually emerges in another part of the story. Hence, a shepherd's daughter "who is fond of soothsaying" recognizes a young bull as the enchanted son of her father's master ("The First Old Man's Tale," 29), while the unnamed sorceress wife of a king in "Jullanar" similarly sees inside the bird before her to recognize King Badr of the Persian ruling house in Khurasan, whose entire history she relates with no information about his identity other than his white feathers, red beak, and red legs (498–9). A princess in "The Tale of the Second Dervish" understands that the chess-playing ape is "a wise, learned, and well-mannered man, a man of culture and refinement (131), another feat of magical perception.

The shapeshiftings above are simplicity itself in contrast to the phantasmagorical transformations that follow upon the princess's recognition of the ape in "The Tale of the Second Dervish." In an elemental battle, the demon who earlier transformed the prince into an ape descends "in the semblance of a lion as big as a bull" to counter her efforts to restore his human shape. In a synechdotal response (de Blécourt, 1999: 191), a hair from the princess's head becomes a sword with which she cuts the lion in two. The lion's head, however, turns into a scorpion, which she, as a huge serpent, pursues. They continue to battle, first as vulture and eagle, and then as piebald tomcat and black wolf, until the tomcat turns into a worm and creeps into a pomegranate lying beside a fountain that swells until it bursts, scattering its seeds. As a rooster the princess pecks up all the seeds except, alas, the one containing the demon's soul, which falls into the fountain and becomes a fish. The rooster, as a larger fish, pursues it, until "the demon came out as a burning flame followed by the girl, who was also a burning flame." The fiery battle continues until all that is left of demon and princess is ash (132–5). The battle culminates in fire in all its forms: burning flame, sparks, smoke, more flames and sparks, and the princess's desperate cries, "The fire! The fire!" (134–5). The prominence of fire links these transformations to pagan fire worshipers, of whom the wicked Queen Lab, a Magian sorceress, is the collection's chief representative, significant because fire worshipers are the most reviled of all pagans in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*.

In using the magic taught by the old woman and learned by hard study (131) to disenchant the ape, the princess in "The Tale of the Second Dervish" violates oaths taken "that neither [the demon nor the princess] would cross the other" (132). After the ensuing battle, as the princess is expiring, she explains her defeat this way:

> "'Although I am not used to fighting demons, . . . I fought him under the earth and I fought him in the sky, and every time he initiated

> a domain of magic, I countered with a greater domain and foiled him until I opened the domain of fire. Few open it and survive, but I exceeded him in cunning, and with God's help I killed him' . . . she kept crying out, 'The fire! The fire!' until all of her body burned to a heap of ashes." (134–5)

We may understand the princess's account as a literary construction that heightens and intensifies the powers of opposing forces, those represented by the malevolent demon and those embodied by the beneficent princess. The literary process takes place before a backdrop of imputed practical magic. Nonetheless, the "seventy domains of magic" the princess learned under the old witch do not reflect magic as it might have been practiced at the time this story was committed to paper, for its 70 domains are referred to nowhere else in the literature of the practice of magic. That leaves us with a second literary understanding of the 70 domains, namely as a symbol for finite but extensive learning that the princess copied and committed to memory (131).

The third part of the princess's account of her defeat parallels *Alf Layla wa-Layla*'s descriptions of fire worshipers. A follower of Zoroaster, the Magian Queen Lab invokes the tenets of her Magian faith – the fire, the light, the hot wind, and its palpable opposite, the cool shade (504) – to achieve her ends. Although a related imagery of fire, flames, sparks, smoke, and ashes fills the epic battle between the demon and the princess, she is a believing Muslim who cries out, "God is great! God is great! He has conquered and triumphed. He has defeated the infidel!" After she again cries out, "In the name of the Almighty God and His covenant, be yourself again," she sprinkles the ape with water and after a good shake, he becomes a full-fledged man (134).

Several forms of magic practice that appear separately in other tales are joined together in the densely magical "Tale of the Second Dervish": the use of water, synechdotal magic, and the use of objects with inherent magic powers. Frequently water initiates or completes a conjuration to transform a human into or out of animal shape. A shepherd's daughter fills a bowl with water from which she sprinkles a bull to return him to human form, and at the other end of the collection, Prince Badr is sprinkled and spat upon to complete a spell (494, 499). When he can, he does the same to Queen Lab (513). Whether water use reflects its treasured rarity in desert lands or whether it suggests a Muslim opposition to Magian fire, water remains a constant in a large proportion of magic transformations, displacing the dust with which a demon sprinkles the storyteller of "The Tale of the Second Dervish" early in the collection (126).

Synechdotal magic, as it appears in tales of the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, requires exploration. Words muttered by the well-schooled princess over a strand of hair from her head turn it into a sword that pits her powers against the demon-as-lion and cuts him in two (133). That is, the single hair apparently embodies the powers of her entire knowledge of 70 domains of magic. Two other instances of synechdotal magic occur in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. The Second Lady tells the listening caliph that a helpful demon serpent gives her a tuft of hair (presumably from its head, but not explicitly declared to be so) with directions to burn two of the hairs to summon her when in need of assistance ("The Tale of the Second Lady," 179). In a third instance of synechdotal magic in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* a pious man envied by his neighbor overhears benevolent demons explain that a princess possessed by the demon Maimun ibn-Damdam can be cured by burning seven hairs from the white spot on the tail of the black cat that lives in the pious man's hermitage. In this case, simple cohabitation enables the cat to participate in the holiness and the powers conferred by the man's religious litanies and recitals of the Qur'an, a condition that is neither logical nor persuasive to modern readers and possibly not to readers and listeners five centuries ago. Perhaps that is why the text's author includes secular forms and reference points (a black cat, the number seven) along with an impossibility (white hairs from a black cat) that is made credible (by providing the black cat's tail with a white tuft of hair the size of a dirham) in order to validate this instance of magic ("The Tale of the Envious and the Envied," 123–4).

Objects with magic powers, the third category for implementing supernaturally efficacious acts, are varied. Some objects embody magic properties in and of themselves, like a bridle that makes Queen Lab submit to her she-mule condition in "Jullanar of the Sea" (513). But in other cases, a magic object's indwelling powers are enhanced, perhaps even caused, by inscriptions. All the better, if the script is Hebrew, like the "knife engraved with names in Hebrew characters" ("The Tale of the Second Dervish," 132), with which the princess draws a perfect circle to initiate the ape's disenchantment. That she then inscribes (presumably Arabic) names in Kufic letters (the squarish calligraphic style in which the oldest Qur'ans are written) suggests her double approach to the Divinity through the scripts of two Holy Writs, the Hebrew and the Arabic. By the end of the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, Hebrew letters have given way to "the words inscribed on the seal ring of God's prophet Solomon, son of David" ("The Story of Jullanar of the Sea," 472), a formula later repeated without the phrase "God's prophet" (478).

Another seal ring in the same story belongs to King Badr's sea-born uncle Sayih, this one "engraved with one of the names of the Almighty God" and conferring protection against sea creatures (487).

God the Omnipotent stands above all workers of magic in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla,* as is also the case in Jewish medieval magic tales. Archetypal is a shepherd's daughter's magic. First she fills a bowl with water, but before she uses it to sprinkle an ape, she qualifies the water's inherent powers by making them subject to divine will:

> "'Bull, if you have been created in this image by the All Conquering Almighty Lord, stay as you are, but if you have been treacherously put under a spell, change back to your human form, by the will of God, Creator of the wide world'". ("The First Old Man's Tale," 30)

We can understand this episode as a portrayal of a pagan ritual practice (using water to conjure) overlain by an Islamicization of that practice to affirm God's supremacy. In the subsequent "Tale of the Second Dervish," the same affirmation appears as an assumption that divine power is greater than the powers conferred by even a deep knowledge of the 70 domains of magic: in the moment that the king's daughter defeats the demon, she utters the cry of both battle and amazement, "God is great, God is great! He has conquered and triumphed: He has defeated the infidel" (134). In "Jullanar of the Sea," God's powers similarly confront pagan ones. Jullanar's transformational abilities restore Badr from bird-dom "by the power of the God of the world" (516), as she sprinkles him with water. On the other hand, Queen Lab and her mother never invoke any but their own powers to work magic on the pages of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (511, 512, 514, 515). In other words, Lab's magical powers are presented as her own, while Jullanar's are shown to be God's, and therefore more powerful within the Islamic subtext that accompanies "a narrative structure of belief in the supernatural" (Mahdi, 2009: 258).

In "Jullanar of the Sea," it is a foregone conclusion that God and his legions will vanquish pagan forces. That is not, however, the case in "The Tale of the Third Dervish," which depicts a world where a hero is adjured not to disclose his allegiance to God until after a supernatural brass oarsman has completed a ten-day journey to bring him to safety. That this oarsman stands for forces opposed to God emerges on the ninth day. In an excess of joy at glimpsing land, the Muslim passenger exclaims, "There is no God but God," and the boat promptly capsizes, casting him into the sea (141) in a display of a non-Muslim power's effectivity.

This discussion does not exhaust the subject of magic in the medieval *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla*,[11] but it addresses the two texts' major points. In both *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* magic's effects on tale heroes and heroines is as often maleficent as it is beneficent.

Achieving a happy ending within these tales is problematic. A hero's marrying, being enriched, and enjoying a high social status occurs in a few tales, but when it happens, it is not brought about by magic but is conferred by a caliph, whose role, in the words of Muhsin Mahdi, is that of "a providential agent on earth" (2009: 259). Even when such an ending seems to be imminent, as when a king proposes a marriage between his daughter and the ape who is an enchanted prince, it ends badly: the princess dies in her mortal combat with a demon (135).

The tales are designed to divert, but they also claim an edifying purpose, as the Foreword added in the later eighteenth century (Ott, 2004: 651) asserts. A self-advertising trope, its wording is nonetheless revealing: "The Thousand and One Nights abounds also with splendid biographies that teach the reader to detect deception and to protect himself from it, as well as delight and divert him whenever he is burdened with the cares of life and the ills of this world. It is the Supreme God who is the True Guide" (3).

The expectation that delight and diversion should follow presentations of the plots and worldviews evident in the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* as well as in the earlier *Tales of the Marvellous* implies that its readers and listeners are at one with the collections' underlying narrative premises. Premises, however, change as society changes, a truism exemplified in the next chapter's exploration of the relationship of content, perceptions of magic, and technological change.

Hundred and One Nights: A Coda

In 2005, a c1235 manuscript composed in Moorish Andalusia was sold at Sotheby's, and in 2010 was shown in an exhibit of treasures from

[11] For Muhsin Mahdi, magic is "a blend of the verbal and the nonverbal to transcend and transgress the real" and in *Nights* tales a problematization of "the concept of images and icons" (2009: 258, 260). Mahdi's literary discussions of magic within the medieval *Alf Layla wa-Layla* and its modern version *The Arabian Nights* build on Tzvetan Todorov's explorations of the verbal properties of the fantastic by adding observations about non-verbal components of magical processes, so that his comments often illuminate and extend Todorov's observations, while my efforts here attempt an understanding of magic within the context of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* characters who use or are affected by what they perceive to be magic.

the Aga-Khan Museum at the Berlin Martin-Gropius-Building. Claudia Ott, an Arabist and ethnomusicologist performing at the opening night, immediately recognized the manuscript as *Mi'at Layla wa-Layla* (Hundred and One Nights) and received permission to examine it, subsequently translating it as *Hundert Eine Nacht* (Hundred and One Nights) in 2012 (Müller, 2010: 11; Mudhoon, 2010). Not only is this manuscript of *Hundred and One Nights* earlier than both collections discussed in this chapter, it is also more than 400 years older than previously available *Hundred and One Nights* texts. For instance, until now scholars had at their disposal the 1911 translation into French by Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes and the critical edition in Arabic published in 1979 by Mahmûd Tarshûnah, both of which are based on eighteenth- and/or nineteenth-century sources.

Because *Hundred and One Nights* took shape in the far western reaches of Islam, Ott's translation of this early thirteenth-century collection not only extends the corpus of medieval Muslim magic tales available to those who cannot read the Arabic original, it also opens a window onto a differing perspective on the magic in Muslim magic tales. In addition, the presence in *Hundred and One Nights* of a fragment of "The Ebony Horse", for which a complete version by Adenet le Roi exists from c1285, enables a closer scrutiny of one tantalizing question about the flow of stories across religious and cultural boundaries in the Middle Ages.[12]

Much of the language, imagery, and mindset of *Hundred and One Nights* suggests a merchant readership. Merchants and their families occupy the principal roles in a high proportion of stories, and the stories themselves use mercantile phrases like "running costs" (*laufende Kosten* in Ott, 2012: 16) and "rendering account of his purchases" (*erstattete Bericht über seine Einkäufe*, 69). The stories also communicate market wisdom ("Never do business with borrowed money" [*Mache niemals Geschäfte mit geliehenem Geld*, 16) and caravan economy ("packed up all the treasures that were small in weight but great in value" [*packte . . . alle Schätze . . . zusammen, die leicht an Gewicht, aber schwer an Wert waren*], 42). That these stories were to be read by their owners or borrowers rather than to be listened to is suggested

[12] I am currently pursuing a 600-year history of "The Flying Horse." The *absence* of the *Alf Layla wa-Layla* Prologue tale of the woman who cuckolds the demon who has imprisoned her in a chest is even more fascinating, because it suggests that Giovan Sercambi's 1374 tale is an instance of a subsequently influential tale not yet shared with its Iberian neighbors.

by passages in which a character repeats something that was earlier recounted. In this situation in *Alf Layla wa-Layla* a complete repetition occurs, but in *Hundred and One Nights* a character acknowledges what has been recently read by saying, "Such and such happened to me" (*Mir ist das und das passiert*, 125).

The realism of the caravan economy also marks the stories as a whole. Muhammed Ibn Abdallah, for instance, finds a metal plate embedded in the ground with a ring affixed to it, a magic tale trope for the first stage in entering into an underground chamber. When nothing happens at his touch, he pulls the ring back and forth and shakes it, but the text tells us that it doesn't open until he *turns* it (28). Using similarly mechanical rather than magical means, another hero disables a devouring lion-shaped automaton by "applying a strategy" (*wandte nun einen Kniff an*, 48) and then, when he's asked how he'll deal with a second oncoming sword-wielding human-shaped automaton, responds coolly, "Take it easy, first I have to understand the mechanism" (*Gemach, gemach . . . [i]ch muss erst selbst den Mechanismus verstehen*, 49).[13]

Monarchs, too, are different in *Hundred and One Nights*. They more often sit on thrones and wear crowns (for example 73 et al.), like their European counterparts, and they don't elicit the same abject submission as do *Alf Layla wa-Layla* rulers. Only twice in *Hundred and One Nights* does a subject kiss the ground before his superior (89, 199). But nothing marks the difference between rulers in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* on the one hand and *Hundred and One Nights* on the other hand, more than a doubly unthinkable exchange about Harun al-Raschid between an old man and a vizier's son (65):

> The old man brought him food and drink, and [the vizier's son] ate. Then they conversed for a long time. "How has the new king treated you?" the old man wanted to know.
>
> "He tyrannizes his subjects," sighed the other. "He has a fickle and deceitful nature."
>
> *Der Scheich brachte ihm zu essen und zu trinken, und jener ass davon. Dann unterhielten die beiden sich lange. "Wie ist es dir mit dem neuen König ergangen?" wollte der Scheich wissen.*

[13] Unlike automata that block the way, mountains and seas can't be disabled, and so those topographical obstacles to a merchant's necessary travel are repeatedly adverted to metaphorically (43, 83, 195).

> *"Es tyrannisiert seine Untertanen", seufzte der andere. "Er ist von wankelmütiger und unaufrichtiger Wesensart"* (68).

Criticizing a ruler for tyranny is unheard of in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* and has profound implications that lie outside this inquiry. At bottom, characterizing Harun al-Rashid as a fickle and deceitful tyrant, for he is the character about whom the old man asks his question, shows how far Seville was from Baghdad, in contrast to the Levant-based *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla*, where Harun al-Raschid was monarchy's cynosure and paragon. An altogether different historical memory is at work in *Hundred and One Nights*, one that credits Alexander the Great with erecting towering idols in the Sea of Darkness (70) and attributes the iron foundations of a mighty palace to Amalekites and Byzantine generals (70–1). The mental world of *Hundred and One Nights* differs indeed!

In some cases, however, the magic of *Hundred and One Nights* resembles that of its eastern sisters. A door in the ground leads to a subterranean chamber that opens onto a field or meadow (28–9, 62). Other parallel worlds take shape in the guise of a large round tent on the far bank of a river (53), rather like the one that Lanval encounters in Chapter 7. And then there are dragons – a fire-breathing dragon with a deadly gaze (39–40), a dragon automaton (192), magic fat that protects from dragon bites (187) as well as a helpful dragon (184), and a princess protected by a dragon-skin belt (94). Magic is thematized (41), although sometimes it is simply posited, as when we are to understand that magic has been at work because a palace is constructed of crystal within a 40-mile perimeter of safety (60–3).

More arresting, however, are tale and plot similarities between *Hundred and One Nights* and European narratives. A three-wishes story – wish, unwish, restore original condition – mirrors a vulgar European tale about a penis on the hero's forehead (175–6). An Andalusian and a European tale, both about a son's search for medicine to restore his sick father to health, bear more than a passing resemblance to one another (see *Hundred and One Nights* [187] and Johannes Gobi's 1323–1330 *Scala Coeli* tale #538, with discussion of the latter on page 77–9), while the "Ebony Horse" fragment in *Hundred and One Nights* (197–202) and Adenet le Roi's 1285 *Cleomades* are nearly identical. These facts underline the participation of Andalusian Muslim and Western European Christian writers in a shared religious, popular, and chivalric narrative culture.

There are also differences in degree between values and beliefs expressed in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean tale collections discussed here. The world of material goods is altogether less astonishing in *Hundred and One Nights*. No one is staggered by displays of luxury or power as in *Alf Layla wa-Layla*. Instead the scribe of *Hundred and One Nights* simply declares the ineffability of a castle "that no description could encompass" (*das keine Beschreibung je erfassen könnte*, 25, 35), after which characters approach the indescribable castles and the stories proceed.

As in *Tales of the Marvellous, Alf Layla wa-Layla*, and indeed in medieval Christian and Jewish tales as well, God is acknowledged as the ultimate power. But the *Hundred and One Nights* scribe puts God's supremacy on the page in a personal light. To be sure, he is praised as the Lord of all the world's people (*Lob sei Gott, dem Herrn der Weltbewohner!*, 97), but his attributes are described in terms of the human pleasure He brings about by making the next beautiful day dawn (*Als Gott den nächsten, schönsten Morgen dämmern liess* . . . 95) and of His participation in the least of human activities, such as splitting grain and seeds (*Ich schwöre bei Gott, der Spalter von Korn und Kernen!*, 117). In this manner the God of *Hundred and One Nights* is portrayed more domestically and seems altogether less fearsome than the omnipotent God of *Alf Layla wa-Layla* and *Tales of the Marvellous*.

The same is true of supernatural creatures, the worst of whom are devouring sea monsters (66, 67) and a giant bird that claws away an unfortunate sailor on land (47), while the little devils who speak from skulls that cannibals have hung on their walls are obliging fellows who answer the cannibals' questions (46–7). When a character inquires whether an approaching figure is a human or an *ifrit* (128), the question seems meant to satisfy curiosity rather than to secure mortally necessary information, particularly since an ordinary archer can easily bring a flying *ifrit* down with a well-aimed arrow (136).

The small corpus of *Hundred and One Nights* has the same kind, but a larger share, of happy endings than its eastern sisters. In the presence of the lords of the realm, the wedding of a deserving young man and woman is celebrated with a great feast, and the young man lives on at the royal court, eating and drinking of the finest until overtaken by the certain end [of all human life] (30, 64). A variation on this example of earthly joy has a girl who weds a prince and shares with him the joys of eating and drinking the finest dishes and drinks until overtaken by their certain fate (42), a vision of shared bliss that presages sixteenth-century Italian fairy tale happy endings. Nonetheless *Hundred and One Nights*

remains a Muslim tale collection, which is brought home by the happy ending of "The Story of the Young Egyptian and the Girl Gharîbat al-Husn" (103–12):

> Al-Mu'tasim had an appropriate amount of money paid out to them. In addition, he presented each of them with an animal to ride and sent someone with them, who was to accompany them to the furthest bounds of his country. And so they left him and traveled back to Cairo. They entered the city. First he greeted his father and his family. Then he married the girl, the sister of al-Mu'tasim, arranged a magnificent wedding feast and lived on happily with both women, ate and drank his fill of the most delicate food and drink, until the certain end overtook them. Praise be to God, the Lord of all the world's people!
>
> *Al-Mu'tasim liess ihnen nun so viel Geld auszahlen, wie ihnen angemessen war. Ausserdem übergab er jedem von ihnen ein Reittier und schickte jemanden mit, der ihnen bis an die äusserste Grenze seines Landes Geleit geben sollte. So verliessen sie ihn und reisten wieder zurück nach Kairo. Sie betraten die Stadt. Zuerst begrüsste er seinen Vater und seine Familie. Dann heiratete er das Mädchen, die Schwester al-Mu'tasims, veranstaltete ein prachtvolles Hochzeitsmahl und lebte vergnügt mit den beiden Frauen, ass und trank sich satt an den köstlichsten Speisen und Getränken, bis das sichere Ende sie ereilte. Lob sei Gott, dem Herrn der Weltbewohner!* (112)

The issues explored in *Hundred and One Nights* in this brief coda have not previously attracted notice. In the relatively small corpus of secondary literature devoted to the book, its newly translated opening sequence was primary (Godefroy-Demombynes, 1909: 210–18) and tale provenance loomed large (Ferrand, 1911). D.B. MacDonald's closely argued article "The Earlier History of the Arabian Nights" (1924) incorporated some information about *Hundred and One Nights* within the larger history of the *Thousand and One Nights*, while more recently a nineteenth-century Tunisian manuscript was compared with two nineteenth-century Egyptian print editions with reference to the respective authors' character focus (Pinault, 1992: 226–7). Most recently Ulrich Marzolph and Aboubakr Chraïbi produced a two-part article "The *Hundred and One Nights*: A Recently Discovered Old Manuscript" to introduce it to the scholarly world, while Claudia Ott's "Afterword" (2012), which points out its typically Andalusian "kings" and its specifically Andalusian imaginary geography (243–4), set the content analysis of *Hundred and One Nights* in motion.

Gender relations and identity in *Hundred and One Nights*, largely unrelated to concerns about magic and the supernatural, beg for close scrutiny because they differ so greatly from those expressed in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* and seem to lie closer to those evident in medieval Jewish and Christian texts. Whatever tendency toward shared attitudes one might find in Muslim, Jewish, and Christian medieval magic tales, gender also marks a great divide. The worthy hero of a medieval Christian tale was rewarded by only one wife or beloved, her singularity the fundament for much of the action of the narrative explored in the next chapter.

6
Magic at Court and on the Piazza

As the three previous chapters show, oral performances in the medieval period were infinite in their variety. Some were spontaneous, the outbursts of court jesters or village fools, or the witticisms of clever individuals. Others were prepared. The preacher had studied the sermon tale he told to small or medium-sized crowds outdoors or to larger audiences in church; the minstrel had closely read the courtly epic that he sang or chanted for a courtly household and its servants, and he might check it against a prompt sheet in the course of his performance if he needed reminders. Coarse and bawdy fabliaux might be told with snickers and winks to guffawing listeners of either high or low status, or both together. All of these performance occasions were court-, church-, or household-related, that is, they took place among people who gathered together because they governed or served at court, or were addressed by the church and its functionaries, or were sharing the same roof, either briefly or for the long term. Among all of the storytelling venues that existed in the medieval period, court, church, and household venues predominated into the high Middle Ages, that is, until around 1250–1300.

When towns and cities became increasingly prominent, patterns of change and continuity in urban culture differed considerably from one region to another; and even within single regions. But that is not the brief here. We are interested in how city- and town-dwellers' experience of city and town life affected the stories they told. City life in Europe and the Americas in the twenty-first century offers a pale, much muted, and highly sanitized version of city life eight centuries earlier. Then, people were packed into a limited space, with a high density on the ground. Passageways were thronged, streets crowded, and clusters of individuals would have constantly formed and re-formed in any open space: apprentices in workplaces, celebrants at festivals, crowds

in a piazza jostling in the street outside the large open shelf of a cook or drink shop, or seated on benches inside an inn. Unlike the male-dominated public spaces depicted in *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* there were equal numbers of women and men, girls and boys. Renaissance paintings often illustrate this dense traffic, as Patricia Brown's *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (1997) vividly shows.

In urban environments, commerce underlay daily life and promoted commerce-dependent publics that sold their labor or the goods they made for coin of the realm. Barter occasionally survived in cities, just as inklings of a money economy showed up here and there in villages in the countryside. But when all urban transactions are weighed in the balance, it can be fairly said that a consciousness of coin, as ducats and florins, shillings, and pence, and sous dominated urban laborers' working hours. In this respect there is continuity between the Near Eastern world of *Tales of the Marvellous* and *Alf Layla wa-Layla* and this chapter's roughly contemporaneous European world of *Liom/nbruno*. Crucially important changes in worldview began to enter medieval urban storytelling and encouraged the creation of new kinds of stories. For the first time in narrative history, *poor* protagonists, like the hero of the 1470 print *Lionbruno,* interact with a fairy world, rather than simply suffering the effects of supernaturals' actions. The narrative weight of past magical traditions was heavy, however, and modern fairy tale magic emerged gradually through intermediary stages, such as *Liom/nbruno*.

Apprentices, journeymen, artisans, and laborers – boys and girls, men and women – labored long and hard in medieval towns and cities. Their employers and paymasters were guild members, business owners, or their wives or widows. The legal and religious governors of their daily life were a small elite. This description simplifies the ingenious variations on production and governance that typified lives in late medieval European cities and towns, but it is adequate for setting the scene for the evolutionary and revolutionary literary shifts discussed in this chapter.

Newly clustered characteristics distinguished late medieval urban workers from court, church, or household populations and led to the creation of new kinds of stories and storytelling. With different cultural reference points, these new, or newly told, stories needed a different use of language. And constrained by literary, social, and legal traditions that intruded from the world of courts, churches, and households into the new stories' tellings, the new stories and their tellings manifested recognizable textual tensions with those worlds.

This chapter begins with a comparison and contrast between two rhymed narratives meant for oral performance, the twelfth-century *Lai*

of Lanval by Marie de France and a fifteenth-century proto-fairy tale *Liombruno*. Striking plot and motif similarities between the two suggest that Marie de France's *lai* is the literary parent of *Liombruno*, but literary and narrative changes made by *Liombruno*'s author Cirino d'Ancona reflect a changing worldview that preceded and perhaps precipitated the rise and restoration fairy tales of Giovan Francesco Straparola in the following century.

The *Lai of Lanval* and courtly verse

The *Lai of Lanval* was in all likelihood composed by Marie de France in England in the 1170s (Burgess, 1987: 1–34) with the following plot:

> Lanval, a royal prince far from home and family resources, is a knight at King Arthur's court. Unrewarded for his service, the dejected hero one day quits the city (*cité*) and rides out to a meadow, where he dismounts and rests. As he lies gazing before him, two transcendently beautiful young women approach with a message: their mistress wishes him to come to her. He accompanies them to a richly furnished pavilion, where a young girl (*jeune fille*), reclining on a sumptuous bed, tells him of her love for him. He responds in courtly fashion; she promises him "everything he could desire" (l. 137), but their love must remain secret, if it is to continue.[1] Lanval fervently agrees, joins her on the bed, and remains there for hours. She promises to come to him discreetly whenever he wishes, adding that only he will [be able to] see or hear her. Then her maidens clothe him richly, they dine together, and he returns to the city, where he finds his retainers unexpectedly richly attired. Lanval openhandedly distributes his newly available wealth.
>
> One day Queen Guinevere draws Lanval aside and confides her love for him. He demurs, but she persists. His continued disinterest spurs her to accuse him of preferring men, which he hotly denies, citing the love between himself and his lady (thus breaking the prohibition of speaking of her), the least of whose servants, he says, outstrips Guinevere in beauty. Outraged and humiliated, Guinevere takes revenge by accusing Lanval of attempted rape. King Arthur, furious, puts Lanval on trial, with the proviso that he be pardoned only if he can prove the truth of his boast to the queen about the beauty of his beloved. Interrupting the trial, his beloved appears and

[1] Note that the fairy beloved's requirement echoes Aphrodite's instructions to Anchises not to name her as his lover and the mother of their child Aeneas.

declares Lanval's innocence. As she mounts her palfrey to return to her kingdom, Lanval springs behind her. They ride off, and are never heard from again.

The *Lai of Lanval* is thoroughly courtly in its physical descriptions of the loveliness of his beloved's ideal body: her neck white as snow on the branch, her shining eyes, her perfect nose, her beautiful mouth, her brown eyebrows, her fine forehead, and her curling blond hair. When he gets in bed with her and stays all afternoon, no forthright fabliaux ribaldry follows, only an ingenious ambiguity that he was well lodged (*bien herbergé*, l. 153–8).

Courtly, too, are the Arthurian court and its characters King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, Gawain, and Iwein. Lanval himself, the son of a powerful king (*Fiz a rei fu, de halt parage*, l. 27), exemplifies nobility with his valor, generosity, beauteousness, and prowess (*valur . . . largesce . . . bealté . . . pruësce*, ll. 21–2).

The fairy court of Lanval's beloved, on the other hand, not only exemplifies courtliness, but also incarnates spectacular luxury: sumptuous purple tunics (l. 57–9), a precious cloak of Alexandrian purple lined with white ermine (ll. 101–2), and a bodice slit to reveal the wearer's *flancs* (ll. 565–8). Equally splendid are the fairy court's furnishings: a marvelously carved basin for washing hands, a sculpted window frame, fine plates, and palate-tempting dainties. Even the harness of the fairy beloved's horse is *riche* (l. 561).

The objects that show their owner's power bespeak a feudal economy of exchanging services for goods, an exchange that in the Arthurian world could also be carnal: as the *Lai of Lanval* opens King Arthur is rewarding military service by distributing women and lands to his counts, barons, and knights (ll. 14–17). Distributing women? Perhaps captives from Arthur's wars against the Picts and Scots against whom he was fighting (l. 3)? Pict and Scottish women as Arthurian booty? Lanval, though of royal birth, is far from home and without political support, and therefore receives nothing.

Wealth in the *Lai of Lanval*'s feudal economy is not measured in money expended to acquire rarities, because, as Marie de France states, no king in the world would have enough to buy the fabulously costly accoutrements of the fairy realm: the value (Old French *le pris*, l. 87) of her golden eagle is beyond estimation and her bed coverings have a value equal to that of a castle (*li drap valeient un chastel*, l. 98). Thus when the fairy beloved bestows wealth on Lanval, it is as "whatever he wants," in the sense of objects desired rather than the money with which to buy them. And

consistent with a feudal economy of exchange, Lanval uses her gifts of gold and silver as rich gifts to others, as payments for prisoners' ransoms, performers' clothing, the creation of honors, and as largesse for strangers as well as friends (ll. 209–16). Further expressing a feudal economy, Lanval's anti- or non-commercial disbursal of gold and silver establishes his reputation for open-handed generosity, so central to courtly ideals. Courtliness encompasses essential identity, as becomes clear when Lanval's fairy beloved declares not only who the hero *is* – a courtly chevalier – but also who he is *not* – "neither a fool nor a rustic" (*n'estait mie fols ne vileins*, l. 177). That is, Lanval knows the rules of courtly life and he lives his life at court, not on the land, throwing into high relief a tension between the identity of city- and country-dwellers, which we also encountered in the roughly contemporary *Asinarius*.

The rules of courtly life include obedience to one's mistress in courtly affairs, and require promises of obedience as part of wooing. Gender looms large in this game of obedience, with *Lanval*'s author Marie de France making it plain that she favors women in control: when the two lovers ride away to *Avalun* at the *Lai*'s conclusion, he is on *her* palfrey, mounted *behind* her (ll. 659–661), denoting Lanval's devotion to her.

Connotative are the delicate words with which the author Marie discreetly details the first significant change in the relationship between Lanval and his beloved. At the time they first meet in her pavilion she is *la pucele* (l. 93), that is, "the virgin." But after an hours-long dalliance on her richly caparisoned bed, she calls him her *amis* (l. 159), code for physically and sexually beloved, and as the plot unfolds, she remains correspondingly his *amie* (l. 187) in the game of courtly love. In the final scene, however, Marie reverts to *pucele* in referring to Lanval's beloved, possible because Lanval had discreetly never revealed the physical nature of their union, but had only claimed to love and be loved in return. As a result, the extent of their relationship's intimacy remains a secret shared by the *Lai*'s readers and listeners but not by Arthur and his court, so that in this courtly context the author Marie, a sovereign mistress of connotative language use, allows her heroine to remain virginal.

The *Lai of Lanval* fits comfortably within the literary tradition of courtly epics and makes use of standard devices of time (springtime) and place (ideal court). Like many high medieval literary works, the *Lai* invokes characters from antiquity, with Marie adverting to Semiramus the legendary embodiment of unparalleled beauty (l. 82), the pagan goddess Venus, Aeneas's beloved Dido, and his wife Lavinia (ll. 585–6).

Another feature of Lanval's vaunting the love between himself and his beautiful beloved constitutes the boast so typical of medieval epic

heroes' rhetoric. Marie obviously recognized it as such, for she thematizes it when Lanval's supernatural beloved speaks to King Arthur of *la vantance* (the boast, l. 640). Above all, Marie writes of a fairy world parallel to the human world: as Lanval reclines on a meadow by the side of a river he is still within the geography of King Arthur's court, but when two beautiful *dameiseles* (l. 55) accost him and lead him to their mistress's nearby *paveilluns* (l. 76), that slight but significant distancing removes Lanval from the world governed by the Round Table and leads him into a separate and supernatural realm. As such, the *Lai of Lanval* is more a prototype for fairyland fictions than for fairy tales, but it is analyzed here because it engendered the proto-fairy tale *Liom/nbruno* three centuries later.

When we consider other narrative building blocks for the *Lai of Lanval*, we confront a paradoxical trio of motifs that repeatedly recur in later literary history. Lanval's beloved promises that she will come to him, but be invisible and inaudible to others (*nulls huem fors vus ne me verra/ ne ma parole nen orra*, ll. 168–9), that she is responsible for his sudden and unending wealth (ll. 201–16), and that he alone has the capacity to gain entry to her separate and ideal world, whether on his own steed (ll. 39–56) or on her palfrey (ll. 657–60). These narrative actions correspond functionally to the magical motif trio of the cloak of invisibility, the ever-full purse, and the seven-league boots in later fairy tale history, but Marie does not formulate them as specifically magic objects. They remain fairyland processes.

Liombruno and piazza entertainment

The verse manuscript *Liombruno* first saw the light of day about 300 years after Marie de France composed the *Lai of Lanval*. Attributed to Cirino d'Ancona, it resembles the *Lai of Lanval*, is commonly held to have been derived directly from it, is structured in two parts of about equal length, and shares numerous motifs with the *Lai of Lanval:*

1. an eagle (a golden legionary eagle in the *Lai of Lanval*, an eagle who carries Liombruno from an island to Aquilina's kingdom in *Liombruno*);
2. barons who plot the hero's downfall (*Lanval*, line 332, 397, 418, 428; *Liombruno* Part I);
3. a superbly beautiful fairy princess, described in courtly and erotic mode in the *Lai of Lanval*, and rendered in standard late medieval rhetoric in *Liombruno*;
4. the trope of never leaving the princess's side;

5. a requirement to produce the beautiful princess: in the *Lai of Lanval* as proof of his boast that the least of her retinue is more beautiful than Queen Guinevere and in *Liombruno* solely as proof of his boast;
6. and two beautiful damsels who precede the hero's beloved (twice in the *Lai of Lanval*, once in *Liombruno*).

Here, then, is the plot of *Liombruno*:

A large demon (*uno grande dimonio*, stanza 4, l. 6) offers a poor fisherman money and a rich catch in return for one of his sons. But when delivered to the demon, the nearly seven-year old boy makes the sign of the cross, causing the demon to flee. Soon thereafter a bird in the shape of an eagle-demoiselle carries him to a distant castle, where it becomes a beautiful ten-year old damsel, Princess Aquilina, to whom the waif courteously expresses his thanks and into whose service he then enters. She waits eight years while he studies and masters courtly skills; when they are 18 and 15 respectively, she is moved by physical desire for him and they become wife and husband, living together in her impregnable castle. However, Liombruno falls into melancholy and wishes to visit his family. Princess Aquilina grants him a year's leave, giving him a magic ring that will provide him with everything he needs.

Liombruno returns home, bestows rich gifts on his family, and learns that the King of Granada will award the hand of his daughter in marriage to the winner of a tournament. He asks the ring for strong armor and a fine charger and sets off for Grenada, where he enters the lists, triumphs, and wins the princess. The Saracen barons, however, doubting Liombruno's origins and marital status, trick him into boasting that his lady is the most beautiful in the world, and require him to produce Princess Aquilina as proof. Acclaimed as supremely beautiful, she rebukes him as a *falso renegato*, dispossesses him of the magic ring's powers, and leaves him without arms, steed, or wealth. Abandoned deep in a forest, Liombruno encounters two dangerous robbers and Part I ends unresolved.

Part II opens with a summary of Part I, and then returns to Liombruno among robbers who are disputing the division of their booty: a cloak of invisibility, boots that bring swift passage to distant places, and a pile of gold florins. Liombruno addresses the robbers in Latin; the robbers ask him to help them divide the spoils. Liombruno tries on the boots, dons the cloak, scoops up a fistful of florins, and disappears into the night, leaving behind the dumbfounded robbers who kill each other in a rage at their loss.

> Liombruno begins his search for Madonna Aquilina. At an inn, he encounters well-traveled merchants, tells them of his quest, and learns about a place that only the wind knows how to reach. Perhaps, one merchant suggests, he can be helped along his way by an old hermit, to whom the winds return each evening. Booted and invisible, Liombruno soon reaches the hermit, gains his trust, and explains his plight. One of the 71 winds advises and guides him until they come within sight of the mountain where Aquilina lives, at which point Liombruno continues alone. He opens one wing of the double-doored portal by unspecified magic (*per incantamento*), finds six dragons, kills them, and joins his lady at table. Invisible, he eats from her platter, leaving her astonished that food disappears without her having eaten it. She sighs, audibly praying God to protect Liombruno. Then he places the formerly magical ring on the meat tray, a *gran meraviglia* that induces melancholy in Madonna Aquilina. She retires, followed closely by the invisible Liombruno, and climbs into bed, again followed by Liombruno. Sensing a man's presence, she shrieks, but on the third occasion, she uncloaks him and asks how he got there and set her heart on fire. Then he tells her everything; she calls him "my soul" (*anima mia*) and confesses her misery. They kiss and make the peace of love. The text says that the great joy (*la gran liticia*) that they made together cannot be put into words, although it provides a reprise of their physical joy in each other in courtly terms (*insieme pur d'amore*). The text concludes with a simple statement: this story has been furnished for your honor (*questa storia è fornita al vostro onore*).

This telling of *Liombruno* from manuscript MS Antonelli 521 in the Ariostea Communal Library in Ferrara (published in *I Novellieri Italiani* [304–39]), is thought to date from about 1470, that is, three full centuries after Marie of France composed the *Lai of Lanval*. The two works share the same general plot: love between a man without earthly resources and a supernatural beloved from a barely accessible magic realm. The earthly lover offends his beloved, who then distances herself and cuts him off from the magical benefits she earlier conferred. The hero's mortal endangerment (*Lai of Lanval*) or his daunting quest (*Liombruno*) softens the beloved's anger and leads to their joyful reunion.

With her sensuously immediate and corporeally recognizable youthful beauty, Madonna Aquilina is every bit as enchanting as Lanval's supernatural beloved. And although Liombruno is but the child of a poor fisherman, he enters pagehood at the age of seven, at which

point he is already capable of expressing his thanks "courteously" (*cortesemente,* stanza14). This is also the point at which the text tips away from a populist approach and back toward its chivalric and ruling class origins, with Liombruno accepting courtly servitude: "Milady, I am well pleased that I will always be your servant (*Madona, io sum bem content, vostro servente sempre serone*" [stanza 14]). He spends eight years studying to achieve the skills that will admit him to knighthood and promote him to a socially acceptable marriageability. Liombruno's step into a well-established courtly position, that is, into a page's apprenticeship for a hoped-for knighthood, marks a speedy and dramatic change in his condition. Formerly untutored and ignorant, he now becomes a pupil in a universe in which his virginal mentor waits eight years for him, all of which happens in the space of a single stanza.

The courtly part of Liombruno's performance is brief, and is firmly anchored in earlier medieval tropes, such as a princess who freely expresses her desire; the necessity for a man who is to marry a princess to be her social equal; a "boast" that occurs five times in a single stanza (as *se vanti, il vanto, davanti, se vantasse, il vanto*) to confirm a plot device that was a routine dramatic turning point in medieval epics (Bonafin, 1993: 575–608); generous dispensation of gifts "with perfect love" (stanza 29); and above all an insistent characterization of physical love as "pure." Courtly metaphors such as "he's a lily, she's a rose" (stanza 17), and Liombruno's lady being a *ferma colonna* of his heart are also present, as are motifs from courtly and chivalric literature, like a Saracen tournament, formulaic transfixing and unhorsing, and a magic ring that resonates with a lady's love and fidelity. Earlier medieval literary sensibilities are clearly present, with Princess Aquilina, a beautiful 18, moved by physical desire ("*Infra mio core non averòmai posa, se io non facio la mia volumptade: io voglio essere sua legitima sposa*" 310: 17, 4–6) nearly equaling the longing that *Asinarius*'s princess felt for her donkey prince. (See Chapter 4.)

The composition of social clusters in towns and cities differed from those in courtly households, where official agenda were set by the ruling classes, however joyfully or defiantly transgressive occasional behavior might appear to be. Consequently, other aspects of *Liombruno* express the values and experiences of a world far different from that of the *Lai of Lanval*, and consequently *Liombruno* foregrounds different conditions. For instance, the kind of urban audience usual for a late medieval urban storysinger would be familiar with the merchants that Liombruno told his parents he'd been with before returning home. Whether that urban audience consisted of hard-put apprentices or hardworking artisans, they would have thought merchants, as their betters, might well be rich.

And indeed, the idea of merchants is plot-determining in *Liombruno*, when, for instance, one of them informs its hero about how to find Madonna Aquilina's kingdom. Another aspect of medieval experience is implicit in the suspicions about Liombruno voiced by the Saracen king's barons, which we may understand as poor listeners' understanding the impossibility of a fisherman's son marrying a princess or a Saracen king's daughter, with or without eight years of knightly training. Hence, in *Liombruno* the Saracen king's barons withdraw to discuss their doubts about Liombruno's prior life and current condition. Another hint about *Liombruno*'s intended audience lies in the absence of a wedding ceremony between Madonna Aquilina and Liombruno. Artisans and shopkeepers wouldn't have required a church ceremony to enter into matrimony in the 1400s, and Aquilina and Liombruno's becoming wife and husband without benefit of clergy once she has expressed her desire for him would have been a familiar action in their own lives, although for a princess like Aquilina marriage without a wedding would have been historically unthinkable. We even find traces of the visual world of the 1400s that differ significantly from those in the *Lai of Lanval*'s medieval surroundings: the angels in *Liombruno* seem to be of a piece with the references to Jesus and God – an integral part of the imagery of the fifteenth-century world, attested to by contemporaneous sculptures and paintings. And finally there are *Liombruno*'s dragons. By the late 1400s, high medieval chivalric epics had taken to the streets along with their dragons, which had become courageous heroes' generic opponents. Liombruno's dragons don't merit one word of description: the author alludes neither to their color, texture, nor to their temperature, despite their fiery breath. As familiar narrative figures, they were made threatening by their number – six in all. They are secular supernaturals, unlike the religiously tinged demons in Chapter 5.

It is also illuminating to consider what *Liombruno*'s audience seems to have been *un*familiar with. They might have known dragons well, but they needed to have a magic ring explained to them, which is achieved by having Madonna Aquilina detail precisely what it can do: at his request, it will provide everything he wants, such as money, clothing, food, defensive and offensive weaponry, and transportation (*A questo anello ciò che tu dimandi,/ a tut oil tuo volerre tu l'averai:/ dinari, roba et ancora vivandi,/ ma queste cosset u non palegiarai;/ se pere tua bocca questo spandi,/ arme et cavalla tu perderai* (stanza 23).

Magic that is familiar to modern readers often seems unfamiliar to the *Liombruno* audience, as the author specifies that unexpected events are brought about *per arte* or *per encantamente*. The cloak of invisibility

and the magical boots, he explains, work because of their *virtù*, their essential powers, but the expression of those powers such as invisibility or speedy travel elicit wonder and amazement, unlike their acceptance in the fairy tales that would appear in the sixteenth century, by which time they had become routine.

Liombruno presents abundant evidence of shifts in social ordering from the courtly *Lai of Lanval*. In the earlier *Lai,* readers and listeners were repeatedly reminded of a knight's unceasing obedience to his lady, with dire consequences for revealing their secret love. In contrast, the manuscript *Liombruno* prohibits the hero from staying away from Madonna Aquilina for more than a year, with no reference to the hero's having broken a prohibition. Laurence Harf-Lancner discusses medieval prohibitions, their breaking, and their unhappy consequences as part of the Melusine tradition, and perhaps we must understand the fuzziness into which Liombruno's transgression fades in the print version discussed below as part of an automatic expectation of a prohibition-as-trope on the part of author and audience. On the other hand, there is much in *Liombruno* that suggests that even when a prohibition is incorporated into a plot, obedience as a male category of behavior toward his lady has significantly faded in overall narrative importance by 1470, thus marking yet another change between the *Lai of Lanval* and *Liombruno*.

When Liombruno's behavior is transgressive, Madonna Aquilina's response differs from the heroine's swift punishment of her lover for his disobedience in the *Lai of Lanval*. In the late 1400s Madonna Aquilina both regrets and laments punishing Liombruno for his infidelity, an instance of a literary diminishing of women's empowerment that began to overtake female characters in brief late medieval writings between 1450 and 1550 (Bottigheimer, 2000). Little wonder, then, that obedience to his lady plays a small role as a category in the 1470 manuscript romance (Harf-Lancner, 1984: 243–61).

The language of *Liombruno,* largely denotative, also diverges from that of the *Lai of Lanval,* which was often connotative. Most of the writing in *Liombruno* directly depicts actions. For instance, when Aquilina herself arrives at the Saracen court, she is acclaimed as supremely beautiful, but although her presence there reunites her with the man who loves her desperately, she leaves decisively and abruptly, as the script notes (*poi se parti e non fece dimore*, 46, 4).

Naming deserves special mention in conjunction with language use, for it is striking that Lanval's beloved is never referred to or addressed by a given name. She remains, instead, an ideal presence whose beauty, grace, and wealth have no reality here on earth, even in King Arthur's

court. She and her maidservants are categorically beautiful, preternaturally graceful, and supernaturally wealthy. In that respect they represent cultural categories, even though Lanval's beloved is physically real enough to change from a virgin to a woman on the bed in her pavilion. Liombruno's beloved, in contrast, bears the name of her aquiline alter ego. As milady (*madonna*) Aquilina she first appears as a beautiful ten-year-old, later as an even more beautiful 18-year-old, and finally – before she is reunited with Liombruno – as a sorrowing woman.

Religious usage offers yet another set of contrasts between the *Lai of Lanval* and *Liombruno*. A formal invocation to a *superna deità* (1, 1–2) opens Part II of *Liombruno*, and is closely followed by the abandoned child's making a ritual sign of the cross to save himself from "the demon," as the devil is referred to. Madonna Aquilina's beauty is cast in language familiar from foundational religious narrative: "Look at me," she says, as she changes into a damsel, as beautiful as if she had just come from Paradise (13, 3–4). Liombruno promises to return to his beloved within a year "if God doesn't prevent me" (stanza 22). As far as Christianity is concerned, Liombruno invokes his religion as proof of his reliability when he appears unannounced on the hermit's doorstep. The Virgin Mary, who two centuries earlier had routinely and triumphally delivered suffering women from their (often male-induced) woes, has changed in *Liombruno* into a lady of sorrows. A ministering angel appears in the text (stanzas 34–6), which ends with a brief invocation to the divine.

Although we in the modern world come to both the *Lai of Lanval* and *Liombruno* by *reading* their texts, in their own days both could function as a basis for dramatic performance. Consequently, each may be understood as a script, because each text preserves ample evidence of its function as a support for live – and lively – performance. For instance, the first part of *Liombruno* ends in a cliffhanger, as the hero, bereft of magical aid, stands defenseless among violent highwaymen. The palpable suspense is obviously meant to tantalize an audience into remaining, or returning, for Part II, a conclusion confirmed when the performer-narrator says – or reads – the words, "I'll tell you what happens in the [next] song."

The words we read in the twenty-first century once provided a clever performer-narrator with an opportunity to play the rough and tough robbers' voices against Liombruno's disingenuously clueless questions, which the author further says were posed in Latin! Why claim that Liombruno addressed the robbers in Latin, particularly since the performer-narrator puts no Latin on the page? Probably because only typesetters taking an hour off from pressing lead letters into a forme

for a religious tract would have understood Latin, with the rest of the piazza auditors recognizing its sounds only from church ritual. After all, a Latin-speaking knight born the son of a fisherman was a patently absurd concept. Equally amusing was Liombruno's question to the robbers, given their argument about dividing the spoils. "What might you be doing on these paths?" How the performer-narrator could have grimaced as he spoke the words, "Nothing we're going to tell you, fellow" (322: 4, 8). With the scene set, the tension mounts, with abundant opportunity for comic voiceovers. The three robbers accuse one another of conspiring with Liombruno, they resort to fisticuffs, and they kill each other, while Liombruno makes off with cloak, boots, and booty. Against this raucously humorous background the performer-narrator addresses his audience as "Milords," even though they were much more likely to identify with *Liombruno*'s introductory words: "I find," he declaims, "that poverty impedes many individuals, depriving them of liberty and bringing them to despair." The continuing script exemplifies the introduction: a poor man is brought to such straits that he is ready to give his son to "the demon."

The opening summary anticipates listeners' empathy with the effects of poverty on a poor man. The stanzas that follow assume a listener's intimate knowledge of poverty, but not of courtly habits, which the narrator explains in detail. These contrasting narrative stances suggest that the performer-narrator prepared a script specifically for an urban audience with a shared experience of penury. The script has the poor fisherman called "the good man" (even though he hands over his youngest son to a demon in return for fish and money), with the demon's words labeled "false counsel," although the benefits of the fisherman's bargain with the demon are cast as a boon to the fisherman's family. In addition, the author points out that the bargain caused the fisherman great pain, apparently to confirm listeners' sympathy with the sufferings of the poor.

Humor marks another great shift from the mood of the *Lai of Lanval* to *Liombruno*. Calling Liombruno *il baron di bonitade* is slyly ironic. The thieving bandits who set upon one another once Liombruno absconds with their boots, cloak, and dinars produce pure antic comedy.

Some of the *Lai of Lanval*'s socio-economic characteristics, such as a barter economy, still exist in *Liombruno*, where it is written that there isn't money enough on earth to buy the boots and cloak (stanza 6): the cloak itself is worth a royal crown (stanza 8), the boots a thousand mountains of dinars (stanza 41). There is good reason for the anachronistic language of barter and equivalence within a commercial urban

environment. Consider, for instance, that the very nature of manuscript reproduction impeded change, that the fact of a lector facing copyists meant reading from an existing manuscript, while his words were written down. In the normal course of events, a manuscript's words would be changed only if the lector were reading from a copy that had been intentionally altered by purposeful editing – or if he or the scribes made an error. With its manuscript roots deep in the medieval courtly tradition, successive *Liombruno* manuscripts would reasonably continue to reproduce narrative elements appropriate to that tradition, even as changes might be made to the script to be performed in public. Or perhaps the presence of competing worldviews in *Liombruno* reflects a dual audience. And because significant change had taken place in people's experience of the world between 1170 and 1470, what had been called "gold and silver" in the *Lai of Lanval* became "florins" in *Liombruno,* and sometimes those florins are spoken of as a means of the hero's purchase or acquisition, as was the case in commerce in 1470s Italian towns and cities.

Even as the contents of the manuscript *Liombruno* were being declaimed in urban piazzas, the tale it told was being printed and distributed by the hundreds all over northern Italy, just as was the case with scores of other popular narratives. Like them, *Liombruno* was a bridge from pre-print medieval practice to the world of early modern print.

Italian popular print and magic tales

Print liberated stories.[2] That simple statement stands for a sea change between 1450 and 1550 in stories' availability to the general public. Before 1450, religious and secular stories, saints' lives, chivalric romances, and courtly ones had all been available as manuscripts. But even the cheapest unillustrated manuscripts were relatively expensive and hence only buyable by a limited readership. As far as the common man or woman's knowledge of such stories in the pre-print era was

[2] Elizabeth Eisenstein's studies, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) and *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (1983), initiated widespread discussion of the power of print. Revisionist views such as those in Joseph A. Dane, *The Myth of Print Culture* (2003:10–20) expand Eisenstein's evidence base, but her underlying position remains valid and illuminating. When the technology of print was applied to popular literature, its magnitude introduced new sets of ideas, and the contents of its printed products confirmed shifts in thinking.

concerned, it was in public locations, such as a marketplace or a church that they came to know any story with a sustained plot that was longer than an anecdote, a fabliau, or a joke.

The technology of movable print and the hundred- and thousand-fold reproduction of stories that print made possible after the 1450s enabled the common man and woman to enjoy stories like those performed by story-singers (Benucci et al., eds., 2002) in private ("in camera") as well as in public ("in piazza"), since from the 1450s onward somebody with a few extra pennies in their pocket could carry a story home after having heard it in the marketplace. Within a few decades, that was happening on a daily basis in northern Italy. To judge from surviving imprints (Passano, 1868; rpt. 1973; Lommatzsch, 1950–51), both chivalric and courtly romances were among the most popular publications in the late 1400s.

The evident appetite for stories in the languages that people spoke – not in Latin or Greek, but in Italian, French, English, German, and the major dialects of those languages – fostered a market in translations into those vernaculars from Latin authors like Apuleius and Ovid (see Chapter 2). The Italian language represents a special case. Between 1450 and 1550, translations from Latin into Italian were five to ten times more frequent than from Latin into other European languages, and in those years stories like *Pyramus and Thisbe* were adapted wholesale from their Latin originals for the Italian market in cheap booklets. Of the classics, *Pyramus and Thisbe* was hardly the only example. The 1557 *Historia di Giasone et Medea* (Lommatzsch 3: 27–39) told of their bitter marital strife and Medea's retributive use of magic. Ovid's *Caccia di Melagro* (Hunt of Melagro) from Book VII of the *Metamorphoses*, his *Orfeo e Eurydice, Perseus,* and *Lucretia* (Lommatzsch, 3: 52–63; 3:64–73; and 3: 74–83) also formed part of the market in popular print between 1450 and 1550, albeit in Christianized forms that would startle contemporary readers accustomed to classic versions.

The history of another tale, "Beauty and the Beast," shows how print and printing presses disseminated medieval plots over long distances, suddenly and simultaneously. Boccaccio had begun the process: he discovered "Cupid and Psyche" in the mid-1300s, awakening it from centuries of slumber. In 1469, little more than a century later, "Cupid and Psyche" was printed for the first time, in Latin, and sold throughout Europe. (Copies of this *editio princeps* survive in major libraries.) Within about a decade printed books thus spread far and wide the story of a beautiful princess who was under the impression that she had married a monstrous serpent. In country after country, printers and publishers

recognized Apuleius's Latin novella as a good story with broad sales potential, and so they translated it from Latin into local languages. Each translation produced slightly differing local versions, which over the centuries became ever more individual (Bottigheimer 1989a, 1989b). The same popular printing process also disseminated identical accounts of the magic in Ovid's and Apuleius's narratives simultaneously and instantaneously throughout western Europe.

Until now I've used the term "popular print" without defining it. Popular print denotes books, pamphlets, and broadsheets printed in the languages spoken by ordinary people rather than in elite, learned, scholarly, or liturgical languages such as Latin, ancient Greek, or Hebrew. Furthermore, in the earliest period of print, a "book" could be as insubstantial as a single sheet of paper folded three times to make a 16-page pamphlet, or a fourth time to make a smaller sized 32-page one. If a story were lengthy, its telling might require several sheets, which, when folded, were stitched together to make a thicker book of some multiple of 8, 12, 16, or 32 pages. Long books, however, were a rarity in early *popular* print.

Hundreds upon hundreds of cheap books printed for a broad market have survived from the years between 1450 and 1500 from the Italian peninsula and from other parts of Europe. Even more are available from the 50-year period from 1500 to 1550. In their popular print form from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the surviving tales, including *Lionbruno* (Levi, 1914: 344–8), give a lively picture of the stories that ordinary people were exposed to. They also demonstrate that the components for early modern fairy tales were growing in number and density, and that secular magic was in the process of being reoriented vis-à-vis religion.

Public storytelling in Northern Italy

Italy had long been home to public storytelling, and – as indicated in the early part of this chapter – it principally took place in the piazzas at the heart of Italian towns and cities. Public storytelling reached all levels of society, because it was openly available to whoever had the time, or to whoever took the time, to pause in their daily rounds to listen to storytellers or storysingers.[3]

[3] Stories and the time taken to read them is a central question that few scholars have considered. An important essay that does so is Stephanie West's "ΚΕΡΚΙΔΣΠΑΡΑΜΥΘΙΑ? For whom did Chariton Write?" (2003).

Once heard, a storyteller's or storysinger's stories could be told again at home, because they could be retained. "Retained" has a special, and palpable, meaning. Before the age of print, story retention had depended on an individual's personal memory of an oral telling or of a public reading or else had depended on their personal possession of a manuscript copy of the story that had been performed or presented. The manuscript copy used by a storysinger, on the other hand, could – to judge from surviving copies – be either a finished piece of literature or a prompt book that was open to improvisation (Everson, 2001: 118). But with the advent of the printing press, storytellers and storysingers were not only paid for the stories they performed – the words "narrare" and "contare" often appear in the printed texts – they could also *sell* copies of the stories they told. Thus a performed story that was heard in the marketplace could be carried home by the listener, could be re-read, and could be re-told in virtually the same words that the public storyteller or storysinger had used in reading from his own printed copy of a tale.

The fact that storytelling in public performances was a common practice in northern Italy is enormously important for the history of European storytelling, because the short works performed by storytellers and storysingers provide direct evidence both of the content of public performances of printed tales for a popular *listener*ship and of their subsequent use by a popular *reader*ship. Legions of these little booklets have survived. Hernando Colon (1488–1539), son of Christopher Columbus (=Colon), was fascinated by them, collected them, and bequeathed his 50,000 early sixteenth-century popular imprints to his native Seville, where they now rest in the Biblioteca Colombina (Rubini, 2003: 35). The Spanish-born Colon was one of several collectors of Italian popular print in early modern Europe. Avid Italian, French, and English aficionados also bought and kept large numbers of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century *storie* and *canzonette*.[4] In northern Europe, the Ducal Library at Wolffenbüttel houses an extensive collection of popular Italian print from the period 1450–1550. Lesser European court libraries also once had and often still have collections of early print. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, research into early popular print generated a lively interest that then lapsed until the late 1970s, from which point it has steadily grown.

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[4] For a hint of some now-dispersed collections, see Novati, 1913:18–19 and the library citations in Passano's 1868 listings. Private collections that included narratives (*storie e canzonetti*) noted here include the Italian Strozzi (11); the English Grenville (16); and the French La Vallière (11).

Catalogs of original library holdings together with later reprints of individual texts demonstrate the kinds of tales being performed before late medieval publics. The romance of Pyramus and Thisbe's star-crossed love was known in medieval France thanks to copies of the French-language *Ovide moralisé* and its Latin successor *Ovidius moralizatus*, the version used in schools. The Italian *Una bella istoria di nobili amanti Pirrame e Tisbe* probably owed its existence to translations of this Ovidian tale from Latin, since Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was readily available to every printer who wanted to draw on it to produce a "new" popular narrative for non-Latin-reading book-buyers. Romances of love and marriage among royal couples with a happy outcome – unlike poor Pyramus and Thisbe's tragic end – were frequent (Everson, 2001). In *La Elegante et Bella Historia degli nobilissimi amanti Paris et Viera* (Venice: Ioanne da Trino, 1492), a royal couple remained childless until – an instance of miraculous magical intervention – God took pity on them and they were able to produce their beautiful daughter Viera, who eventually married Paris. The story's international genealogy followed late medieval and early modern cultural and literary pathways: a fourteenth-century Catalan manuscript was translated into French (1432), English (1485, by Caxton), and Italian (1525). It was printed in Florence (1476), Treviso (1482), and Venice (Joh. da Trino 1492), and remained in print in Italy until the mid-1600s (Lommatzsch 1: 36–7). Authors of popular print were multifarious: Pope Pius II (1405–64) composed another such romance, published as *Historia di due amanti* (Milan: Lionardi Vegio, 1510), now in Harvard's Houghton Library.

Chivalric romances also existed beyond Italy in western Europe as a whole. They represented for the most part the martial exploits of Merovingian and Carolingian heroes, such as Charlemagne, Roland, and their companions (Thomas, 1920/1969: 31; Lucía Megías, 2000; Everson, 2000). By the time print democratized chivalric romances, tales like the Italian *Buovo d'Antona* already existed in France as *Beuve d'Anton* and were being translated into English as *Bevis of Southampton*. In Spain chivalric romances were well established in the world of print by the 1490s and flourished in the 1500s (Lucía Megias, 2000). There was much back and forth borrowing as printers imported foreign chapbook romances and nativized them. One instance among many is the Spanish *Tirant lo Blanch*, the first 27 chapters of which were based on the English *Guy of Warwick Part II* (Thomas, 1920/1969:34). Venice, with its scores, even hundreds of printing presses, produced chivalric romances not only for home consumption, but also for audiences abroad. The Spanish *El libro de santo Iusto Paladino de Franza*, for example, was printed there in 1490 and was only one of many such Spanish-language Venetian imprints (Lommatzsch vol. 2). Chivalric

romances' widespread popularity also made them good material for spoofs. Imagine *La Polenta* (1530), which tells a tragic history in comic verse of how Charlemagne's noble paladin Roland died from eating too much polenta (Lommatzsch 1: 171–4)!

Magic contrasted starkly with daily life, and there was plenty of magic in popular print. A magic sack that produced in abundance whatever its poor owner needed was circulating in the late 1400s and early 1500s (Rubini, 2003: 31), with incunabula appearances in (putative or real) pilgrims' accounts of travels to the Levant. As a freestanding brief narrative, it was published as the *Historia di tre Giouani: et di tre Fate* (Tale of the Three Youths and of the Three Fairies) in Venice, Brescia, and Florence (Rubini, 2003: 27–8). (One early copy remains in Seville's Biblioteca Colombina.) This tale flourished and spread in the following centuries, going to Augsburg for its first German printing and ultimately becoming the beloved German-language *Fortunati Glücksäckel*, in which a poor boy gets possession of a magic purse that produces everything he desires.

Storytellers and storysingers at work

Let us try to recreate the situation of a storyteller's or storysinger's public performance in a public square somewhere in northern Italy. As the storyteller began his tale, the piazza would have been a busy place: hawkers cried and shouted their wares; wagons and perhaps carriages rumbled loudly across the cobbled square on iron-clad wooden wheels; people clacked past on wooden clogs; one or two prostitutes might have ambled by and mocked gawping listeners; passersby speaking above the hubbub continued on their way without stopping, interrupting or interfering with the performance; children not in one of the town's communal schools for reading and arithmetic would have run about squealing and shouting. All in all, storytelling and storytellers had to compete with noisy surroundings for their listeners' attention.

Stories told in a piazza also shared *mental* space, with the result that storytellers aligned the style of their tales with that of stories people had heard in church. In consequence, in the transitional era between 1450 and 1550, stories typically began with an invocation to "Our Lord," that is, *nostro signore*. The printed text of *Octinello e Julia* provides but one example among scores of such opening words (Lommatzsch 1: 29).

Brevity characterizes Italian stories in popular print in this period, with performance time rarely exceeding an hour from beginning to end. The time required for a story's telling can be viewed as a general indicator for the audience a storyteller addressed. Lengthy romances lasting several hours could only be presented for leisured listeners, for whose identity surviving texts often provide clues in the form of references to

household or knightly objects that were a part of the leisured listeners' lives or to concepts that inhered in their expectations and worldview (Picone, 1984: 90; Zumthor, 1975: 219–36).

The textual structure of a popular print narrative was simplicity itself. It had a small and repetitive vocabulary and an equally simple syntax. Its forward moving plot, unencumbered by subplots, facilitated aural comprehension. Generalities rather than specific descriptions were common. Characters often remained unnamed well into the stories; towns and countries were similarly nameless or else so distant as to be unknowable or unrecognizable. Plots began and ended without dates, with the passage of time impossible to calculate on any standard calendar. The heroes' *personae* were, in effect, a simple exhibition space for spectacular events.[5] A look at the books produced by Venetian printer-publishers makes it clear that in the 80 years between 1470 and 1550 all kinds of books from the Christianized Roman plots of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius's *Golden Ass* to the then ultra-modern continuations of Boiardo's and Ariosto's *Orlando* romances were available, and repeatedly reprinted.

In the commercial and independent-minded city-state of Venice, popular print was good business, and there were few strictures on its publication. Spain's more prescriptive governmental authorities, on the other hand, regulated vain and profane little books among their own population (but see Chapter 8) and kept them out of the hands (and minds) of the New World's local readers altogether. A royal Spanish decree of 1531 declared that Indians and other inhabitants of the Indies should only be presented with stories that touched on the Christian religion and on the virtue manifest in them, while adventures such as *Amadis of Gaul* along with its magic should be prohibited.[6]

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[5] This is Michelangelo Picone's apt description of heroes in romances performed by *contari*. He continues, "disgiunta da qualsiasi motivazione psicologica o spirituale. Il personnagio-mistero del *lai*, sconosciuto a sé stesso prima che agli altri, diventa nel cantare personaggtio-formula: gli elementi fondamentali che costituiscono la sua personalità sono "dati" non "spiegati" (Picone, 1984: 95). See also Delcorno Branca, 1984: "Il cavaliere dalle Armi Incantate" for detailed descriptions of chivalric epics performed by storysingers.

[6] "… me han informado que alas Indias pasan muchos libros de historias vanas y profanas como son El Amadís y otros de esa calidad. Por ser mal ejercicio para los indios el que se ocupen de leer cosas que no deben, yo os mando que, de aquí en adelante, no consintais ni deislugar a persona alguna a pasar a las Indias ninguno de estos libros de historias y cosas profanas. Sólo puede pasar lo tocante a la religión cristiana y de virtud donde se ejerciten y ocupen los indios y los otros pobladores de las Indias." (From Geoffrey Fox, National Writers Union, Authors Guild, Latin American Studies Assn, 14 East 4th St, Room 812, New York NY 10012 212–505–1553.)

For newly composed stories, there were countless available models for tales of restoration in which princes or princesses, sometimes kings or queens, expelled from their royal home, experienced adventures and suffered hardships, and then through a magical intervention of the artificial *deus ex machina* sort, married a royal spouse, after which they were restored to their just social (and economic) position. In practical terms, tales of restoration offered profitable possibilities for the popular press, because adventures and hardships could be expanded, added, or deleted as required. That is, prequels, sequels, extensions to, and abbreviations of known tales such as those in Boiardo's and Ariosto's *Orlando* romances could be, and were, produced for continuing sales of a proven and marketable product.

The foregoing paragraphs make it clear that the printing press played a central role in disseminating old narratives such as medieval romances and creating new episodes for them. Moreover, print expanded the market for stories into lower economic classes by making individual tales cheaper to buy. Thus, potential buyers of popular print might come from increasingly modest social and economic circumstances, and it would have been a prudent course of action for a printer-publisher to commission a story that incorporated humble men and women as protagonists into existing literary forms, such as romances. Whatever caused this sea change, it obviously came about and resulted in a new knowledge of those tales' magic among an ever larger European population.

Lionbruno in print: magic in an almost modern fairy tale

Early attempts to depict a poor protagonist in a magic tale that ended with a royal wedding stayed close to plot lines that already existed. Just such an innovative melding of traditional plots about royalty with a non-traditional cast of poor characters is evident in an early Italian imprint, *Lionbruno*, which is a revealing source for late fifteenth-century popular taste, values, and worldview, as perceived by those who composed for public performance among their contemporaries.

The printed book *Lionbruno* recapitulates its manuscript precursor *Liombruno* in its plot, which put a poor boy, rather than a prince, into the leading romantic role.[7] It maintained close connections with existing religious exempla and romances, while incorporating elements that

[7] Manetti describes the hero as a "cavaliere" and its plot as an intermingling of "conte mélusinien" and "conte morganien," drawing on Harf-Lancner (1984) for these terms (2002: 303).

later became staples of modern fairy tales, such as a prominent use of the number three, a youngest son, a transformation (a bird into a beautiful damsel), a 400-day journey accomplished in a matter of minutes, tasks and trials, and a wedding that unites the story's poor boy to a girl in a castle. Nonetheless, several aspects of *Lionbruno* distinguish it from early modern and modern rise fairy tales whose poor heroes marry princesses. In the first place, it was not magic that made Lionbruno acceptable in the heroine's eyes, as would always be the case in fairy tale plots as they emerged in the following century. Instead, it was courtly accomplishments that the humble hero achieved through eight years of careful study and practice that made him an acceptable suitor. In the second place, Lionbruno and Aquilina's wedding occurs early in the tale and is separated from its happily-ever-after conclusion by the remainder of the first half and by the entire second half of the tale, whereas in early modern and modern fairy tales that unite an impoverished hero or heroine to a royal consort, a wedding normally marks a story's culmination. (There are one or two exceptions among composite fairy tales.) On the other hand, the tasks and trials that constitute the bulk of *Lionbruno* have remained the stock in trade of modern fairy tales, whether they tell of social rise or royal restoration: enchanted doors, a magic ring, a time-limited journey home, a prohibition, an instantaneous passage to a distant destination, a crossing over into an alien culture (Lionbruno's visit to Saracen Granada), and a forgotten bride.[8]

Although Part I of the print-produced *Lionbruno* incorporates many elements that would characterize early modern fairy tales from the 1550s onward, it – like the manuscript *Liombruno* – essentially looks backward and reminds us of the tenacity of medieval chivalric and courtly romance plot and content. Nothing essential changes in the plot of the print version, and it incorporates all of the manuscript's markers for a performative presentation, including the two-part division characteristic of the *cantare fiabesco* that allowed for an intermission in storysingers' and storytellers' performances (Bendinelli Predelli, 1984: 130).

Part II of *Lionbruno* opens with the hero cannily trying on the cloak of invisibility and the seven-league boots and then picking up the money

[8] Bendinelli Predelli repeatedly notes aspects of *Lionbruno* that depart from the general rules of *contare* (1984: 135, 136, 137), but does not go as far as seeing it as a newly diverging genre, that is, a proto-fairy tale, as I do.

and disappearing. His quest for Madonna Aquilina continues until the resolution, when "they threw their arms about each other with the truest love, and upon that bed they made their peace," a scene of connubial bliss that ends the story of Lionbruno and Madonna Aquilina (Cirino d'Ancona, 1976: 36).

As it was told and read in the late 1400s and for decades afterward, *Lionbruno* was still a medieval romance, stripped down to its bare bones so that it could be presented in an hour or so to an audience that was in all likelihood principally composed of laborers and artisans, men and women who were probably taking their ease during a break from work (Picone, 1984: 90). In this respect, both *Liombruno* the manuscript and *Lionbruno* the printed book bore the same kind of almost-but-not-quite relationship to modern rise fairy tales that the medieval *Asinarius* bears to restoration tales. With its poor protagonist (the son of a poor fisherman, who marries a princess) *Lionbruno* was a rise fairy tale in the making. But with the incorporation of real-world social qualifications (training Lionbruno to be a suitable marriage partner, the king's caution, and the barons' realistic objections), the story did not achieve the unquestioned (except by evil antagonists) magical transformation of beggar boy (or girl) to royal consort that Giovan Francesco Straparola would make a standard part of his 1550s rise fairy tale creations, where an impoverished protagonist's suffering was relieved when magical intervention led to a royal wedding.

A woman like Madonna Aquilina tellingly reveals some of the major differences between a tale with its roots in the Middle Ages and one with an early modern urban overlay. In brief medieval narratives, girls and women behaved with far greater independence than was the case in brief tales formulated after the middle of the 1500s. This was true all over Europe, not just in Venice (Bottigheimer, 2000). In medieval brief narratives, a noble woman often sought out a suitor, as Madonnna Aquilina did. It was often she who determined the course of the courtship and the timing of the marriage, as Madonna Aquilina did. And it was she who participated just as enthusiastically and joyfully in sexual union, as Madonna Aquilina also did. In pre-print romances a woman's actions took place in conjunction with a social equal, hence the importance placed on Lionbruno's eight years of training in chivalry. Only after thoroughly learning the courtly skills that Madonna Aquilina specifies is Lionbruno asked to marry her. And we note that *she* asks *him*.

With seven documented Italian printings before 1500, the print version of *Lionbruno* clearly offered a plot that hundreds, perhaps thousands,

of people bought and that many more read. Those reprints indicate that each successive print run sold out. Unlike nearly all other popular print in the period, *Lionbruno* was the only tale in which a poor boy married royalty in combination with (lots of) magic. It remained the sole example of this kind of plot until the 1550s. That is, magic did not generally help a poor boy or girl marry royalty in any of the decades before Straparola published the first of his rise fairy tales in *Le Piacevoli Notti* (The Pleasant Nights) in 1551.

The century in which *Lionbruno* first appeared and continued to be printed was a period in which the position of girls and women was changing in brief narratives all over Europe. During the 1450–1550 literary transition, girls and women in brief narratives were losing their narrative independence. In addition, when a poor person married royalty in this period, that person's social rise does not seem to have been a wish-fulfilling device; instead, such an atypical and extraordinary social rise was attenuated by what often seems to be a didactically charged constraint. One example occurs in the 1490s *Florindo e Chiarastella*, where a poor peasant boy Florindo marries Princess Chiarastella and becomes King of Spain. It wasn't magic that brought about this atypical union, but the necessity to demonstrate the power of a prophecy (Lommatzsch, 1950: 1: 88). The same narrative motor drove the medieval Jewish tale, "Solomon's Daughter" (see Chapter 3), which is embedded in the frame story that allows Solomon pre-eminence in earthly matters, but emphasizes the religious message that God's will still takes precedence (Elstein and Lipsker, 2004; Bin-Gorion, 1976: 170–1; Bin-Gorion, 1990: 70–2). The very same message is conveyed by Henry of Huntington's legend about King Canute, in which the ocean's incoming tide demonstrates the limits of earthly royal power. The message that God's limitless power subsumes the intentions of even the most powerful earthly ruler underlies and encloses every version of "Solomon's Daughter" (Bottigheimer, 2010: 472–4), and thus demonstrates a commonalty among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim perceptions of the relationship between the Divinity and secular magic.

As far as magic tales of restoration are concerned, their plots of suffering princes and princesses restored with magic help to their rightful place remained as popular as they had been in the Middle Ages. In response to the new market for stories among humble readers, some got shorter, but most remained as long as the seemingly endless *Orlando* books by Boiardo, Ariosto, and their continuators. Fairy tales, whether restoration or rise, with the characteristics of modern fairy

tales, including brevity, had yet to appear, for magic effective for earthly improvements in one's life still belonged to divinities.[9]

The effect of print

Both stylistic and structural continuity and content change mark the history of *Lionbruno*. The print tale retains the manuscript version's iconic boasts, magic ring, boots, and cloak, and incorporates several of its stanzas verbatim. But a number of apparently subtle but significant changes characterize the shift into print that produced *Lionbruno*. From the point of view of the slow emergence of fairy tales and their characteristic forms of magic, the most thoroughgoing changes involve God, money, and women.

Popular attitudes toward divinities and supernatural powers, judging from changes made to the print *Lionbruno,* were in flux. The manuscript "demon" regularly becomes the "devil" (*diavolo*) in the print telling. The manuscript is theocentric: Liombruno qualified the date of his return by making it divinity-dependent, that is, "if God wills." But in the print version, theocentricity diminishes as men move toward center stage, and Lionbruno himself confidently takes responsibility for his return, saying, "That can easily be done" (Cirino d'Ancona, 1976: 22). The same dilution of divine powers occurs when the print Lionbruno prepares to go to the Saracen court: he thanks God, but asks the magic ring to equip him for the tournament (ibid.: 26), a significant tipping toward the primacy of secular magic, as it emerges in the following century.

The change in God's status on the pages of *Lionbruno* is accompanied by an apparent paradox: the less God actually steers the world on the pages of *Lionbruno*, the more rhetorical appeal there is to liturgy and

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[9] Jurjen van der Kooi alludes to the distinction between fairy tale elements and fairy tales themselves in discussing structural and motivic elements of thirteenth-century Dutch romances and a fourteenth-century play. With reference to rise and restoration fairy tales, van der Kooi writes: "Seit dem 13. J[ahrhundert] in den mitteln[iderländischen] lit[erarischen] Texten, die sich Erzähltypen zuordnen lassen, nachweisbar. Wenn sie auch noch nicht eigentliche Märchentexte darbieten, so weisen doch bereits die Romane Karel ende Elegast (13. Jh. … , Ferguut (13. Jh.) … und Walewein (ca. 1260) … strukturelle oder motivische Verwandtschaft mit bestimmten Erzähltypen auf. In einer Episode des Torec von Jacob von Merlant (ca. 1260) lässt sich AaTh 301: Die drei geraubten Prinzessinnen erkennen, und das weltliche Spiel Esmoreit (14. J[ahrhundert]) zeigt auffallende Übereinstimmungen mit AaTh 652 … Inwieweit es sich hier um Vor- oder Frühformen dieser Märchentypen handelt, ist jedoch eine offene Frage" (2002: vol. 10: col. 25).

Christian identity. The invocations that open and close, and thus frame, Parts I and II, are longer and more detailed in the printed books than in the manuscript versions. Moreover, the number of times that God, Jesus, and Mary are named notably increases throughout Parts I and II in the print version. Even the hermit becomes more religiously observant, crossing himself when Lionbruno arrives and calling on *christo* and *maria* for protection, and being reassured when he hears Lionbruno declare his Christian identity and call on the immaculate virgin (*verzene pura*, 22). Such rhetorical intensifications of Christian identity suggest a range of historical possibilities. They may represent a state effort to intensify Christian identity among listeners via their readings of books submitted for permission to be published. Alternatively they may hint at the printer-publisher-author's expectation that listeners to the performance or buyers of the printed sheets had a more self-aware Christian identity than had been the case in earlier generations when the manuscript version of the tale had been composed. But it might also be the case that rhetoric was beginning to fill in a blank space left by an increasingly secular approach to daily life. Most likely of all is the existence of multiple levels of belief in individuals and in the population as a whole in the late 1400s, within which commercial interests led printer-publishers to adopt a politically unexceptionable and therefore safe position.

Money offers a second point of contrast. In the manuscript *Liombruno* the robbers of Part II squabble over a pile of money that is indiscriminately referred to as *fiorini* (in stanzas 10, 14, 23) or *dinari* (in stanzas 12, 23, 24). Moreover, these heaps of money are never counted up. In the print *Lionbruno*, on the other hand, money routinely consists of florins, the coin that then commonly circulated commercially. And even more significantly, Lionbruno doesn't steal generalized plural florins (*fiorini*) from the robbers, he carries off 3,700 florins. The gold content of florins was a then legally determined amount, 54 grains of pure gold per coin, hence those 3,700 florins were worth at least a princely several hundred thousand dollars.

Madonna Aquilina's authority diminishes in the print *Lionbruno*. This contrasts sharply with the power wielded by the unnamed supernatural beloved in the *Lai of Lanval* as well as with the manuscript *Liombruno*. Her diminishment is centrally significant for early modern brief magic tales, including fairy tales. Consider the ways in which her autonomy lessens. In the manuscript story, marriage to Liombruno is the culmination of her physical desire (*volumptade,* stanza 17) for him, but in print she circumspectly offers marriage: "May it please you to become

my husband" (*ora te piazia de esser mio marito*, 17). When Lionbruno becomes melancholy, Madonna Aquilina submissively asks him why he seems angry at her (21).

Just as girls and women are being shorn of the protection offered by female companions in other brief narratives in the period between 1450 and 1550 (Bottigheimer, 2000), so too are Madonna Aquilina's supernaturally beautiful attendants deprived of their supreme and validating beauty, leaving solely *her* beauty to prove the truth of Lionbruno's boast after the tournament and also reducing any sense of her independent separateness. In much the same way, the Virgin Mary in the print *Lionbruno* has none of the power so evident in earlier Marian tales (see Chapter 4), but is restricted to being Jesus's mother (Part II, stanza 1).

The literary character Madonna Aquilina internalizes her diminished status in the print version by turning her regret into a self-accusation of wrongdoing, when she laments that she committed a great sin (*gran peccata*) in having deprived Lionbruno of arms and a horse; whereas in the manuscript she had felt sad about their long separation, but had expressed nothing but a feeling of justification in her reaction to his betrayal. The heroine's diminution in the print version extends to imputing physical weakness to her body: in her sorrow she loses consciousness and is carried to her bed (Cirino d'Ancona, 1976: 43). Aquilina was on a slippery slope, and with her were the heroines in brief narratives all over Europe between 1450 and 1550. It was a process that set the scene for the harrowing dangers experienced by girls and women who would be magically rescued by poor boys, youngest sons, fools, or the occasional prince, as the next chapter details.

7
The Problematics of Magic on the Threshold of Fairy Tale Magic: Straparola's Early Modern *Pleasant Nights*

Giovan Francesco Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* (The Pleasant Nights) holds surprises when it comes to magic. The kinds of magic that Straparola introduced into his 1550s tale collection, the ways in which he did so, and his apparent attitudes toward magic are unanticipated, as is the disjunction between Straparola's magic and that documented in studies of contemporary popular magic.[1]

The stakes were high when an author introduced magic into a tale collection in the 1550s. For the previous 200 years, Boccaccio's *Decameron* had provided the primary model for tale collection style and content, a primacy that Straparola acknowledged when he incorporated phrases as well as whole stories from the *Decameron* into the *Pleasant Nights*. And beyond the brilliance of Boccaccio's stories lay Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods,* with its detailed discussions of truth and magic in fiction. Of the four types of fiction distinguished there, the fourth was declared to have no "truth in itself, neither in outward appearance or hidden, as it is the invention of crazy old women" (Magnanini, 2012: 16–17). In this fiction there was no redeeming figurative or exemplary truth, only "tales about the Ogre, the Fairies, and Witches" told "around the hearth with the young serving girls" (ibid.: 17–21). This was where Straparola was headed with his newly composed fairy tales of restoration and rise. Even though there was magic aplenty in fifteenth- and

[1] In the introduction to his critical edition, Donato Pirovano discusses the ways in which Straparola's *fiabe* in general, and his *fiabe di magia* in particular exemplify fairy tale categories as Max Lüthi describes them (2000: xxiii–xxx). He also focuses on the hybridity resulting from merging the traditional *novella* with the *fiaba di magia* (ibid.: xxx). Studies of magic *per se* in the Italian Renaissance are legion and are referred to in the notes below.

sixteenth-century romances, the authors of tale collections had avoided treating the practice of magic as anything other than tomfoolery, for the two centuries after Boccaccio's *Genealogy* set out the overriding requirements for implausibility but not impossibility (verisimilitude) in novellas. Straparola's insertion of magic as an essential part of the plots of his newly frametaled tales in *The Pleasant Nights* was thus both bold and unprecedented.

An exploration of literary magic in the context of Renaissance Venice necessarily implicates past uses of magic in Italian romances, everyday practices in popular culture, judicial responses by secular and religious institutions, and individual attitudes toward divine and satanic efficacy. Further afield lie tantalizing issues about relationships between Straparola's magic tales and the magic in Middle Eastern tales such as those in *Thousand and One Nights* (Bottigheimer, 2014). Here, however, I will concentrate on magic within Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*.

Magic manifested in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*

Straparola's magic objects contrast sharply to daily reality: an apple sings sweetly, water dances, birds and horses speak, and grateful animals give helpful advice. Similarly, supernaturals like witches, fairies, a nixie, and a necromancer – part of a *dramatis personae* "system," in the words of Donato Pirovano (2000: xxiii) – perform magic that moves the tales' heroes and heroines toward the goals they pursue. But along with his revolutionary introduction of magic into a book that included verisimilar novellas, Straparola evinces a vexed acknowledgment of the often sly trickiness of performing magic.[2]

The magic in Straparola's fairy tales initially draws little attention to itself, precisely because it is the sort of magic with which modern readers are so familiar. But that same familiarity obscures the fact that Straparola's fairy tale magic differs substantially from the principal uses to which magic was put in late Renaissance Venice, namely securing carnal love and discovering buried treasure. Records of the sixteenth-century Venetian Inquisition memorialize those pursuits and further detail now alien practices, such as utilizing liturgical objects, concocting love potions, and counting beans (Martin, 1989; Ruggiero, 1993; Briggs, 2006).

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[2] In three tales characters pretend to perform magic in order to fool the credulous – V.4, VI.1, X.1. In each a charlatan gains advantage by making it appear that he or she has magical powers. (NB The Roman and Arabic numerals refer to the night and the story number respectively in Straparola's tale collection.)

But instead of corresponding to those, and other popular practices (Martin, 1989: 38–43, 192–7, 204–13), Straparola's magic is aligned with modern-day concepts of magic as it appears in fairy tales both south and north of the Alps. For instance, Adamantina's doll fills its diaper with piles of gold coins to benefit her poor but affectionate mistress (V.2), an act that fits comfortably within modern instances of inanimate or non-human beings' magical enrichment of the deserving poor. As in modern fairy tales, Straparola's doll has both affect and intention, and when angered, bites into an offender's nether parts, remaining tightly attached until her mistress persuades her to relent. Similarly self-motivated inanimate creatures like the singing apple and dancing water in the story of Ancilotto and Chiaretta's three wondrously gold-adorned children demonstrate an indwelling magic by performing like living, witting creatures, judging morality and bringing a wicked perpetrator to justice (IV.3).

Straparola's love magic is equally alien to the Renaissance inventory of magic objects and practices (Ruggiero, 1993; Duni, 2007: 54–5, 61). Neither do healing conjurations by parallels, signing the cross, or borrowing stories from saints' lives (Duni, 2007: 64, 68; Martin, 1989: 144–7) appear in *The Pleasant Nights*, nor do magic rings, seven-league boots, and invincible swords have any place in his tales, even though they are hallmarks of the medieval romances still popular in his day. On occasion, Straparola even seems to avoid magic altogether, inserting a no-nonsense cloak covered with real-world mirrors[3] instead of the hallowed and more magical cloak of invisibility, grounding the mirror-laden cloak more firmly in the real world by having an ordinary innkeeper give precise directions for its use.

Of Straparola's magically speaking animals, some communicate worldly wisdom, as in the world of traditional wisdom literature. For the third tale told on the twelfth night, he borrowed "De puteolano qui animalium loquelam intelligebat" *(*Tale No. 62) from Girolamo Morlini's 1520 *Novellae*. Its hero learns from a rooster's words how to bring his fractious wife into submission and thereby save his own life. This kind of animal speech exemplifies not magic, but as Boccaccio put it in his *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, the "outer bark" of ordinary instruction in worldly experience (Magnanini, 2012: 16). On the other hand, Straparola also introduces magical animal helpers who are fully

[3] The motif itself recalls and dimly reflects the polished shield that Perseus used to approach Medusa as well as the mythical shield's function, namely, saving the life of its bearer.

aware of their ability to assist struggling heroes and heroines: they include an intentionally helpful white dove who fetches a vial of dancing water for Fluvio and Acquirino (IV.3) and a white snake who confers beauty, grace, perfection, and the ability to produce precious jewels and sweet flowers from hair and hands (III.3), as well as an enchanted horse, who, with conscious awareness of the importance of his help, not only transports a hero from Tunis to Cairo, but gives detailed advice about his further journey to Damascus:

> "'Go back to the sultan and beg him to give you a letter patent addressed to the captain-general of his army who is now laying siege to Damascus, in which letter he shall write to the general an express command that, as soon as he shall have seen and read the letter patent sealed with the sultan's great seal, he shall forthwith raise the siege of the city, and give to you money and fine clothing and arms in order that you may be able to prosecute with vigor and spirit the great enterprise which lies before you. And if peradventure it should happen, during your voyage thitherward, that any person or any animal of whatever sort or condition should entreat you to do them service of any kind, take heed that you perform the favor which may be required of you, nor, as you hold your life dear to you, refuse to do the service asked for.'" (Straparola, 1898: 2: 277–8)

A lengthy address like this reminds readers of the central importance in Straparolean magic tales, as in many medieval magic tales, of the necessity for heroes to remember and carry out detailed instructions on the way to gaining a reward.

Other animals' magical assistance involves an exchange of services, as is typified by the bargain reached between a talking tuna and Peter, the foolish fisherman who catches him (III.1):

> "'Ah! My dear brother, I pray you of your courtesy to give me my life. When once you have eaten me, what farther benefit do you think you will get from me? But if you will let me live there is no telling what service I may not render you.'" (Ibid.: 1: 245)

When the hungry Peter pays little attention, the tuna continues,

> beseeching his captor to spare his life, promising him first as many fish as he could want, and finally to do him any favour he might demand. Peter [. . .] though a fool, fancied he might profit by

> sparing the fish, so he listened to the tunny's petition and threw him back into the sea. (Ibid.)

The fish repays Peter's canny decision by granting him one wish after another, ultimately constructing for him a "rich and sumptuous palace" with gardens and fountains. In sharp contrast, and with a more modern feel altogether, the beneficent cat in "Costantino Fortunato" (XI.1) is prompted not by self interest, as is the tuna fish, but by a disinterested and praiseworthy desire to help her poor master:

> Now it chanced that this cat of Costantino's was [enchanted[4]], and the cat, feeling much compassion for him and anger at his two brothers on account of their cruel treatment of him, one day said to him, "Costantino, do not be cast down, for I will provide for your well-being and sustenance, and for my own as well." (1553; 1898 4: 8)

The rest of the story bears out the cat's benevolent intention as she bags game and presents it to a king as gifts from his purportedly wealthy admirer "Messer Costantino."

By far the most frequently appearing magic animals in *The Pleasant Nights* are creatures moved by gratitude for a kindly act. Livoretto (III.2), having been instructed by his horse to perform whatever service any animal entreats of him, saves a fish stranded in foul waters and later frees a falcon frozen into ice. Both grateful animals give the hero a token with which he may gain their assistance in the future, a pragmatic exchange that requires exactly one good deed in return for another: once the grateful animal has responded to his call, Livoretto must return the token.[5] A similar ethic of exchange underlies "Guerrino" (V.1), whose hero, having won the gratitude of a hornet by freeing it from a jug of honey, is rewarded by the hornet's help in distinguishing between two veiled princesses. In another instance, Fortunio is rewarded with the ability to take on the shape of the wolf, eagle, and ant whose division of spoils he adjudicates to their satisfaction (III.4). In like manner, Cesarino earns the gratitude of a wolf, a lion, and a bear by caring for them in their infancy (X.3). For the history of magic tales,

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[4] I have here corrected W.G. Waters' translation ("the cat which was a fairy...." It should read "the cat which was enchanted" (*fatata*: Straparola, 2000: 669).

[5] See also Eichel-Lojkine, *Contes en réseaux* (2013: 12), a comprehensive exploration of narrative interrelationships in the medieval and early modern periods. We were long unaware of each other's research on R. Yohanan.

it is noteworthy that the grateful animals in "Livoretto" are textual continuations of the grateful animals in the medieval Jewish magic tale "R. Yohanan and the Scorpion" discussed in Chapter 5.[6]

Like the romances circulating in sixteenth-century Venice, Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* also houses human-shaped supernaturals. In "Prince Pig" (II.1) fairies appear as a trio who cast a three-part spell on Queen Ersilia that includes a son's birth with the appearance and manners of a pig. Having set the plot in motion, the fairies simply disappear. The fairy who makes a cameo appearance in "Guerrino" (V.1) laughs so heartily at the sight of a hairy wild man that a coronary impostume bursts and she is healed, in gratitude for which, she restores the wild man to the handsomeness he had earlier enjoyed as Prince Rubinetto. Beyond these fairy supernaturals, there is also a nixie in "Fortunio" (III.4) and a sorcerer in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (VIII.5).

Straparola also introduces humans with supernatural powers into *The Pleasant Nights*, one of whom is Princess Bellisandra (III.2), who deals in extreme healings. To demonstrate her powers, she beheads her beloved, minces his flesh, grinds his bones, kneads and shapes the resulting dough into a more handsome and graceful version, and then revives him with the water of life, reminding us of Medea's use of rejuvenating cookery in Chapter 2 and once again of "R. Yohanan and the Scorpion." In "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (VIII.5) Lattantio practices necromancy (Martin, 1989: 86–101), a craft at which he is quickly surpassed by his apprentice Dionigio, who learns to work "wonders which were even far beyond [his] powers" (Straparola,1898: 3: 152). Lattantio's necromancy, notably, makes no use of liturgical paraphernalia, such as the priestly garments and consecrated water, oil, or communion wafers with which sixteenth-century practitioners frequently drove their conjurations forward.

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[6] This statement is an adjustment to the article, "Dankbare (hilfreiche) Tiere," in the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 3: col, 290. There it is stated, "Die erste europ. Version erscheint in Georg Messerschmidts Gedicht Vom edlen Ritter Brisonetto (1559), wo Ameise, Ente und Bienenkönigin einem Genueser Ritter helfen (die gleiche Kombination wie in KHM 62)" which is footnoted to "Spiegel, F.: Anecdota pâlica 1, Lpz.1845, 53–58; cf. Benfey, 1, 194 sq."

Grateful or helpful animals have been categorized in a dedicated tale type, ATU 554 *The Grateful Animals*, closely related to ATU 505 *The Grateful Dead*. Grateful animal plotlines regularly appear in conjunction with ATU 303 *The Twins or Blood-Brothers*, ATU 313 *The Magic Flight*, ATU 531 *The Clever Horse*, 550 *Bird, Horse, and Princess*, 551 *Water of Life*, 561 *Aladdin*. In eastern Europe ATU 156 *Androcles and the Lion*, a helpful animal of a different sort and from a different tradition, is widespread. See Carl Lindahl, "Dankbare (hilfreiche) Tiere," *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 3 (1981) cols. 287–99.

In the world of Renaissance magic practiced by ordinary citizens, documented in Inquisition records, and analyzed in historical studies, two additional forms of magic – white and black – loom large. White magic, which focused on healing, was broadly tolerated. Black magic, on the other hand, addressed satanic forces, was forbidden as mortally sinful, and was punished as witchcraft. It is significant that of these three historically documented popular magical practices only black magic is paralleled in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*. (See below.)

Literary inventories of magic from classical antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the early modern world were readily available to readers and writers in Renaissance Venice. Greek myths that hinged on transformations from human into animal, vegetable, or mineral existences were for sale as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (see Chapter 2), either in Latin or in Italian translation. There Olympian gods' actions explain the origins of elements in the natural world, as they change mortals into natural features, plants, or animals, as when Zeus transforms the notoriously savage Lycaon into a wolf.[7] The reverse process also existed, with non-human objects like rocks becoming human beings. Greek gods also exploit the possibilities of shapeshifting to gain carnal pleasure, as when Zeus, as a shower of gold, enters the underground chamber in which King Acrisius sequesters his daughter[8]

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[7] Of course, the story could also be understood as an etiology, but Ovid repeatedly uses the word "punishment" in his telling. See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Book I), or trans. Mary Innes, 1955; 34–5.

[8] It was Horace who changed Danaë's imprisonment from an underground chamber to a tower of bronze: "Inclusam Danaën turris aënea …" (*Odes* 3.16), a change taken up by Ovid in Book IV of the *Metamorphoses*: "My name is Perseus, son of Jupiter and of Danaë, whom Jupiter made pregnant with his fertile gold, and that though she was imprisoned in a tower" (Book IV; trans. Innes, 1955; 112. Details and episodes of the Greek narrative appear in Pindar's *Pythian Odes* and *Nemean Odes,* in Simonides's *Fragment* 38, and in images on Greek pottery. Significant for understanding the literary background for Straparola's tales, the elaborated tale states that it was prophesied that Acrisius's daughter Danaë will bear a son who will kill him. He therefore shuts her into a bronze underground chamber to secure her from impregnation. But Zeus comes to her in a shower of gold and she bears Perseus, whom she keeps secretly. At a young age, however, he is discovered. Unwilling to anger the gods by killing his own flesh and blood, Acrisius puts mother and child into a wooden chest and casts them into the sea. On the coast of Seryphos they are netted by the fisherman Dictys (="net") who pulls them from the water and rears the child Perseus to adulthood on the island where his brother is king. The congruence between these details (fisherman, mysteriously impregnated girl, mother and child cast into the sea in a wooden cask, landing on an island, king) and those in Straparola's "Pietro the Fool" (III.1), the first rise fairy tale in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights,* are unmistakable and suggest that he or someone close to him, was well acquainted with this version of Danaë's tale.

or as a swan achieves sexual union with Leda.[9] Athena, to pursue an advantage for her Olympian allies and their (and her) earthly favorites, regularly disguises herself as a character unrecognizable to any but her protégés. The ancient mythic Greek Tiresias experiences a different kind of shapeshifting, dramatically real gender shifts, in which he lives as a woman and bears children before being returned to maleness.

Straparola adopts none of the etiological, strategic, punitive, or enabling categories of magical metamorphoses employed in Greek mythology. Instead, his Costanza, in search of a husband in far off lands, changes her appearance only superficially, when she dons men's clothing (IV.1). Equally superficial is Prince Rubinetto's appearance as a wild man, which results not from a magical transformation, but from a radical change in his looks resulting from poor hygiene and a green diet (V.1). When shapeshifting takes place in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights,* it simply happens and it happens simply. Perhaps a contemporary animal anxiety, as Suzanne Magnanini argues (2008: 93–102, 112–16), determined the shape into which a hero shifted, but the shift itself takes place with relatively little fanfare, as is customary in modern fairy tales. The prince-born-as-a-pig and his mother neither transgress a prohibition nor offend a fairy to merit the gross shift from anticipated baby to a born-as-a-pig appearance (II.1). Nor do the pig's swinish habits function as a task or trial to test his mettle, for his swinishness does not distress him, only those whose royal dress he rudely soils or whose life he casually ends. Much the same is true of Samaritana, who appears without explanation as a small white snake and keeps that shape until it suits her to change it (III.3). Nor are Serena's brothers Fluvio and Acquirino changed into marble statues because they fail to perform a requirement; they are petrified when they approach and touch the statues they see before them (IV.3).

Other instances of shapeshifting in *The Pleasant Nights* point toward a decentering of magic from divine intentions and its relocation among human aspirations. Isabella pays a practicing witch for the services that give her the appearance of her husband's mistress for a night. *She* wants the magic, and so she hires an expert to provide it (VII.1). Similarly Fortunio makes use of the shapeshifting powers conferred on him by his three animal companions when *he* needs or wants them (III.4). In an intensification of human-centered shapeshifting, Dionigi *learns* how to change himself into guises that enrich his poor father, that gain him

[9] Ovid, in Book VI, reports the scene as depicted by Arachne in a tapestry.

entrance to Princess Violante's chamber, and that propel him to victory over his necromancer opponent (VIII.5).

Black magic

The general rule in Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* is that depictions of the practice of magic do not correspond to contemporary Venetian practices, to which Straparola's story "Ortodosio and Isabella" (VII.1) is a notable exception. It represents a magicking of Giovanni Boccaccio's improbable but entirely possible ninth story on the third day, in which a wife wins back her husband by becoming pregnant by him and showing him tokens he gave her, even though he believed he slept with an altogether different woman. Straparola's reconfiguration of this tale shows Isabella using three passion-binding practices common in contemporary Venice: as she undertakes to regain her husband's affections, she is naked during a conjuration, stands in a circle, and calls upon Satan (Ruggiero, 1993; Duni, 2007: 53, 54, 60, 61). Did Straparola know the contents of the infamous Latin-language *Malleus Maleficarum*, which detailed connections between Satan, witches, and sexuality? Had Straparola read the ancient *Clavicula Salomonis,* the most popular book of magic circulating in the 1500s, with its instructions for conjuring the devil by drawing a circle on the ground, invoking satanic powers, and offering sacrifices (Duni, 2007: 47)? Or had Straparola simply read Canto XXV in *Morgante* by Luigi Pulgi (1432–84), where Astaroth is similarly conjured up and Farfarello similarly turns into a horse for purposes of magical transport in Canto XXV of Pulci's *Morgante* (Bonomo, 1958: 368, 368*n*9). Whatever his source, Straparola's witch Gabrina Fureta uses historically documented forms of black magic to help Isabella regain her husband:

> "When the appointed hour for the meeting had come, the witch took her little book in hand and drew a small circle on the ground; then having surrounded the same with certain magic signs and figures, she poured out some subtle liquor from a flask and drank a drop of it and gave as much to Isabella. [. . .] 'Undress yourself, then,' said the witch, 'and enter the circle.' Isabella, therefore, having stripped herself, stood naked as on the day when she was born, and boldly entered the circle, whereupon Gabrina opened her book and likewise entered the circle, and thus spake: 'Powers of hell, by the authority which I hold over you, I conjure that you instantly appear before me!' Astaroth, Fafarello, and the other demon princes, compelled by the conjurations of Gabrina, immediately presented

> themselves before her with loud shrieks, and cried, 'Command us to do thy will.'" (Straparola, 1898: 3: 9–10)

With the information she demands, Gabrina sets in motion the magic-mediated recovery of Isabella's husband. By the 1550s practices of black magic like these were broadly known, categorized, and codified – and carried heavy penalties for their use. A historical witch named Gabrina degli Abeti was branded with a red-hot iron and her tongue cut out in Reggio Emilia in 1375, an event that might have been lost to literary memory, except that Lodovico Ariosto incorporated her into his *Orlando furioso* (1516–32) as Gabrina Fureta, the name Straparola adopted (Pirovano, 2000: 477 n 2). Did Straparola's readers know that a real Gabrina had lost her tongue for her magic? If so, they might have experienced a higher level of suspense about how Straparola's tale would end.

Because either the practice or the advocacy of black magic was dangerous, it is hardly surprising that Straparola treated the subject circumspectly. The two serpents of "Biancabella" (III.3), the one that impregnates her unnamed mother and the one wrapped around Biancabella's neck at birth, might be linked to Satan by the popular traditions surrounding the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, but in Biancabella's tale no one calls on hellish powers. Despite that, the magic of "Biancabella" shares in the implied sexual availability of the black-magicked Isabella, for Biancabella, too, strips naked and stands within a ring, in her case, a circular basin of milk. In Isabella's case, it is eroticism rather than sexuality that drives the episode:

> Almost as soon as she had sat down the serpent appeared and came near her, and straightway commanded her to strip off all her clothes, and then, naked as she was, to step into the vessel which was filled with milk. When she had done this, the serpent twined itself about her, thus bathing her body in every part with the white milk and licking her all over with his tongue, rendering her pure and perfect in every part where, peradventure, aught that was faulty might have been found. Next, having bid her come out of the vessel of milk, the serpent made her enter the one which was filled with rose water, whereupon all her limbs were scented with odours so sweet and restorative that she felt as if she were filled with fresh life. (Straparola, 1898: 1: 309–10)

The drink that Doralice (I.4) takes to survive weeks in a trunk as she flees her father's incestuous lust may belong to the world of black

magic, for it is "a certain liquor which had such great virtue, that whosoever took a spoonful of it, or even less, could live for a long time without nourishment" (ibid.: 1: 84). A parallel uncertainty surrounds the drugged wine that Doralice's ladies-in-waiting try fruitlessly to give her father. The narrators of these stories in Straparola's frametale don't tell their listeners anything about their potions' origins, whether it might be a witch in touch with satanic powers or a wise woman who knows her way around medieval herbals. The potions are simply part of a background availability of liquids with extraordinary physiological properties.

White magic is an entirely different matter. It draws on "divers medical herbs of wonderful powers and virtue" (ibid.: 1: 327), herbal principles that enable Samaritana to heal Biancabella's eyes and to rejoin her severed hands to her body. An equally adept old woman reattaches Flamminio's head to his body with an ointment and a plaster (IV.5). The successful practice of white magic grew from study and experience, often passed from an experienced practitioner to an initiate. Unlike black magic, white magic was overwhelmingly in the hands of women, as is here the case.

Pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, and birth typically precipitate magic practices, and Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* maintains that link. Chiaretta, indulging in an adolescent dream future, imagines a life as the king's wife, while her sisters muse about marrying his chamberlain and his majordomo (IV.3). Only Chiaretta invokes a very special pregnancy as her gift to the king, should he marry her:

> Then said Chiaretta, "And I, if I had the king himself for my husband, I flatter myself that I would give him three children at one birth, two sons and a daughter. And each of these should have long hair braided below the shoulders, and intermingled with threads of the finest gold, and a golden necklace round the throat, and a star on the forehead of each". (Ibid.: 2: 58)

Since their father is a baker, such a wedding is unlikely, and yet the king overhears Chiaretta's words, is intrigued, and weds her on the spot. In due time, attended by her sisters and a midwife, the announced triplets appear,

> two boys and a girl [. . .]. Likewise their hair was braided below their shoulders, and they bore golden chains on their necks and golden stars on their foreheads. (Ibid.: 2: 61)

The babies' number and appearance having been predicted before her wedding, when Chiaretta was still a virgin, it is clear that it is not King Ancilotto who supplies their magical golden hair, necklaces, and forehead stars. Neither is it a fairy that brings about the marvels attending Chiaretta's triplets. The magic to do so resides wholly within her own body and her own spirit, yet another instance of the frequent relocation of magic in Straparola's Renaissance tales into ordinary people, a remarkable *novum* in the European history of brief narratives that would be much imitated in the following centuries.

On the other hand, initiating a pregnancy in *The Pleasant Nights* provides counter examples to otherwise increasingly human-centered magic in these stories. Peter the Fool (III.1) gets the help of a magic tuna to impregnate Princess Luciana at a distance (Stanzel, 2000: 69–81). A snake crawls into the womb of the Marchioness of Monferrato, from which union Biancabella and Samaritana are born (III.3). It is noteworthy that Straparola invites *fairy* participation only in the pregnancy of Queen Ersilia (II.1), where the three fairies' intervention results in a long-awaited conception, whose product, however, is a piglet with a little snout, genuine pigskin, a bristly back, sharp hooves, a wagging tail, and a penchant for rolling in urban muck. The fairies of this tale recall and recover the medieval moment of transition in which the mythic trio Juno, Athena, and Venus merged with the three Fates Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos to produce now-classic birth-attending fairy threesomes, as Laurence Harf-Lancner, Maren Clausen-Stolzenburg, and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère have persuasively argued, while the claimed or real animalness of the baby to whom Queen Ersilia gives birth gains its credibility from sixteenth-century readers' exposure to numerous popular and learned accounts of monstrous births (Magnanini, 2008). In other words, Straparola does not favor an association of fairies with pregnancy and birth but tends rather toward non- or anti-fairy-caused magic pregnancies in the cases of Chiaretta's supernaturally gold-bearing triplets and Biancabella's own body that is embedded with gold at her birth.

One narrative problem in Straparola's collection comes straight from classical antiquity. The impossible task of acquiring a vial of heavily guarded water of life in "Livoretto" (III.2) is paralleled by Apuleius's Pysche, who is charged to carry out that same task by her fiercely antagonistic mother-in-law Venus. Straparola adds two lions to the corps of dragons defending the water of life, omits Apuleius's detailed description of a wild mountain torrent, substitutes a falcon for Apuleius's eagle as supernatural assistant and a simple vial for the classical crystal

container, and reverses the genders of the performers of the impossible task. The details differ, but the episode is structurally identical.

Straparola also formulates impossible tasks from situations known to be physiologically impossible. Whatever an individual's level of belief in the efficacy of potions and incantations, it is unlikely that in the 1550s any Venetian man or woman, girl or boy would believe that pearls and precious stones could fall from a woman's hair as it was combed or that blossoms would spring up around any woman's hands, or that worms and filth would fall from the hair of her wicked usurper (III.3). It is equally improbable, in an era that saw immense amounts of public construction, that anyone could, or did, believe it possible to construct a palace by thrice striking the ground with a laurel twig and pronouncing mystic words (Straparola, 1898: 1: 319). Such an act contradicted observed phenomena in the material world. And yet this mechanical impossibility also provides Straparola with a formulation for an impossible task in "Biancabella" (III.3).

As for transformations, Straparola dipped into the long European tradition of men who –in seeking woodland refuge – become hairy in the process of forsaking civilized habits and green from eating grass and leaves (Bartra, 1994; Basford, 2004; Bernheimer, 1979). Prince Rubinetto's transformation into a wild man follows just this purportedly natural process. Suffering a disappointment, he

> "let go all dreams of love and urbane pursuits, and took up his dwelling amongst beasts of the forest, abiding always in the gloomy woods and bosky thickets, eating grass and drinking water after the fashion of a brute. On this account the wretched man had become covered with a great fell of hair; his skin was hard, his beard thick and tangled and very long, and through eating herbs and grass, his beard, his hairy covering, and the hair of his head had become so green that they were quite monstrous to behold." (Ibid.: 2: 144)

Once wild, always wild was the traditional view of such transformed creatures. Hence, to return the wild man to his former appearance, Straparola engages magic in the form of an ailing fairy healed by her own laughter (a magicking of a Boccaccian precursor in the *Decameron* III.9 novella in which a physician's daughter heals the French king's ventral fistula with God's help, her father's knowledge, and nature's herbs), in gratitude for which she makes him the fairest, wisest, and most graceful youth in the world. Straparola seals the importance of the fairy's supernatural power by having her decree that Rubinetto will also share

"all of the power and authority conferred upon [her] by nature, whereby you will be able to do and to undo whatsoever you will according to your desire," and for good measure, she presents him with "a noble horse endowed with magic powers" (ibid.: 2:152). After Straparola's careful explanation of the natural processes by which Rubinetto became both hairy and green, his instantaneous transformation and generous fairy gifting seem an arbitrarily magical addition. One must entertain the possibility that Straparola's insertion of magic here, as elsewhere, was part of a conscious plan to do so in *The Pleasant Nights*.

Straparola makes open use of the fairy world to make Rubinetto handsome, but paradoxically he seems to go out of his way to avoid using the word "fairy" on other occasions. This aspect of Straparola's attitude toward magic often remains invisible in English translations, where fairies are so often written into the text. For instance, the word "fairy" is inscribed onto Livoretto's and Guerrino's horses (III.2 and V.1) with a "fairy" cat similarly written into "Costantino Fortunato" (XI.1), even though no corresponding word exists in Straparola's Italian. Definitively enchanted (*fatato*) beings certainly exist in *The Pleasant Nights*, such as the enchanted horse that defeats the equine monsters afflicting King Zifroi's kingdom (Straparola, 2000: 330, 336, 337). But in the many cases in which it would be natural to describe a being as a "fairy" or as "enchanted," Straparola often chooses words from altogether different semantic fields. For instance, the impossible-task-performing, wish-granting, talking tuna is a "very wise fish" (*tonno sapientissimo* [ibid.: 176]). In like manner Serena's brothers – who have been changed from marble statues into human form and who before that had sought and found an apple that sings and water that dances – avoid explaining any of these events as magical, referring to them instead as "strange events" (*strani accidente* [ibid.: 290]). And when it comes to describing Bellisandra's resurrection of Livoretto from the dough to which she reduced his body (III.2), Straparola writes of her "astonishing deeds" (*la maravigliosa opera* [ibid.: 196]). Straparola also foregoes magic powers altogether when he sends Rubinetto's "enchanted" horse into battle against the wild horses ravaging King Zifroi's kingdom (V.1) by having him order special horseshoes from a master smithy. Rubinetto leaves little to chance and nothing to magic, as he requests

> "four horseshoes, which must be thicker and broader by the breadth of two fingers than the ordinary measure of horseshoes, well roughed, and each one to be fitted behind with two spikes of a finger's length and sharpened to a point." (Straparola, 1898: 4: 160)

for his enchanted (*fatato* [Straparola, 2000: 335]) horse. These horseshoes' pointed fabrication for lethal combat confers a greater advantage than any indwelling enchantment.

Another aspect of Straparola's attitudes toward magic emerges from episodes in *The Pleasant Nights* in which he engages in strategies of avoidance. When Chiaretta's envious sisters Brunora and Lionella substitute three puppies for the gold-bedecked triplets she has just borne (IV.3), their act is intrinsically verisimilitudinous, that is, improbable but far from impossible. In the same tale the three children's quest for magic objects is supported by helpers, one of whom is an ordinary innkeeper with real-world information about protecting themselves from the poisonous beast guarding the apple they seek. Magic is similarly bypassed in the wily wild man's escape from imprisonment: he snatches Guerrino's prized arrow, offering to return it in exchange for his release (V.1). Neither is it a fairy curse but a spirit of discord that drives Valentino and Fortunio apart (III.4). In "Costanza-Costanzo" (IV.1) Straparola speaks through the queen as she plots to seduce the king's new courtier. A realist, she does not turn to magic, but uses cunning and artifice to gain her end, knowing "that men do not fell to earth a hard oak-tree with a single stroke" (Straparola,1898: 2: 20). When, in the same tale, the king sets what seems to be an impossible task in getting a satyr to speak, the cross-dressed Costanza/o, invokes the ordinary laws of nature:

> "Sire," Costanzo replied, "that the satyr is dumb is no fault of mine; it is not the office of a mortal, like me, to make him speak, but of a god. But if the reason of his muteness comes not from any natural or accidental defect, but from stubborn resolve to keep silence, I will do all that lies in my power to make him open his mouth in speech." (Ibid.: 2: 29)

Straparola likewise eschews magic in bringing about Bertuccio's wedding to a princess (XI.2). Instead of occult magic, Straparola adopts the longstanding literary trope of the grateful dead: Bertuccio has safeguarded and has honorably buried a corpse whose spirit intervenes to help him. Since Bertuccio's tale directly follows the fairy tale wedding brought about by the enchanted cat in "Costantino Fortunato" (XI.1), Straparola may have positioned "Bertuccio" to covertly comment on the previous tale's reliance on magic.

In Straparola's tales magic manifests itself far away from Venice – in Genoa, Bohemia, Tunis, Cairo, Sicily, and Anglia. Distant though these places were, they were nonetheless geographical locations somewhere

on the same earth on which the sun rose and set every day as in the Venice where Straparola and his 1550s readers lived, a world of real life and real people. Thus when Straparola places a story in relatively nearby Verona, lying halfway between Venice and his hometown Caravaggio, he presents magic as a con game. In a tale that rewrites Ortodosio and Isabella's black magic-based restoration of conjugal relations, its apparent witch Finetta was in truth a wily beggar tricking her victim into standing naked in a circle for hours while she steals precious jewels and escapes (X.1). The mystic signs Finetta makes are not magic but deception. Even closer to home, a story sited in the village of Salmazza near Venice's neighboring town Padua, is home to an outlandishly and comically orchestrated incantation got up solely for the lusty peasant Thia to allow her lover to escape her cuckolded husband Cechato (V.4). Both instances are consistent with Straparola's characterization of magic as "a knavish game," part and parcel of the "tricks and deceptions which men nowadays practice upon one another" (VI.1, 1898: 2: 285). To pay back a friend who has taken sexual advantage of his wife's credulity, Messer Artilao "pretend[s] the while to be conversing with a multitude of spirits," who apparently direct him to search for missing jewels "in a valley deep beneath a smiling hill" with his "fishing-rod," a directive he carries out through a series of copulations with his friend's wife, each appearing to result in finding one of her missing jewels (1898 2: 307–8). Pure Boccaccian trickery, without an ounce of magic but with tons of female credulity.

Against this backdrop of familiar or near-familiar landscapes, the magic process in "Biancabella" (III.3) proves a countervailing truth in real life, namely, that one believes what one sees with one's own eyes. Thus, when jewels fall from the hair of the haggard woman standing before him, King Ferrandino recognizes her as Biancabella, his true wife. Her magically jewel-producing hair serves, paradoxically, as crucial evidence in the here and now.

Conversely, in *The Pleasant Nights*, the natural world occasionally confirms the "truth" of magic, as far as readers of a tale are concerned. This process emerges from the details of the story of Isabella's magical quest to regain her husband (VII.1). A man of the hardnosed mercantile world, Ortodosio naturally does not believe his wife's account of traveling to Flanders by supernatural means and of taking on the appearance of his mistress to become pregnant by him. He is instead convinced that Isabella has conceived a child out of wedlock that she now wishes to fob off on him. Isabella proves the "truth" of her narrative of "divine" assistance by showing him the child's foot, which lacks its little toe,

just as Ortodosio's foot is "naturally wanting of a toe" (ibid.: 3: 30). To her husband and her listeners within the tale, Isabella accounts for the events in her narrative not by candidly recounting Gabrina Fureta's black magic, but by falsely crediting a Christian miracle. In the secular world, Ortodosio finds her story of the child's conception incontrovertible because of the natural evidence before his eyes. At the same time, however, readers of the story know that Isabella did, in fact, turn to black magic after Christian prayer failed to bring her long-absent husband home. Consequently, readers in the Renaissance as well as readers today know that her religious narrative is untrue.

The story of Isabella and Ortodosio juxtaposes Gabrina Fureta's magic and God's powers, and in so doing requires its heroine Isabella to produce two narratives. In response, she crafts a tale of a Christian miracle within Straparola's narrative of efficacious black magic. In the course of unfolding in paradox and contradiction, Straparola's story about Isabella evinces a palpable and dangerous tension between effective black magic and ineffectual Christian practice. The Florentine merchant Ortodosio Simeoni, who seeks commercial gain in Flanders and finds voluptuous pleasure in a courtesan's arms, abandons his wife Isabella, who prays for his return without success for five long years. Lacking news of her husband and realizing that prayers, alms, and good works produce no results, the sorrowing Isabella turns to Gabrina Fureta's expert incantations and witchcraft (*nell'arte maga piú che ogni atra isperimentata* [Straparola, 2000: 477]). Through these, Isabella locates her husband and becomes pregnant by him. Ortodosio, aghast, incensed, and believing that the legitimately though magically conceived child has resulted from adultery, hurriedly returns to Florence.

Isabella has achieved the first part of her goal, retrieving Ortodosio, by participating in Gabrina Fureta's black magic. But public knowledge of her participation in black magic would expose her to heavy penalties in a society that mutilated witches like the real Gabrina. And so once Ortodosio sees the child's telltale missing toe, Isabella – that is, Straparola – constructs a patently false but officially acceptable "truth."

> "You must know, Ortodosio, my beloved, that the fastings, the prayers, and the other good works that I performed in order that I might have news of you, brought me fulfillment of my wishes, as you will presently hear. For one morning, when I was kneeling in the holy Church of Annunciata, and praying that I might have news of you, my prayer was granted, and an angel carried me invisible into Flanders and placed me by your side in bed, and so close and loving

> were the caresses which you bestowed on me that night that I then and there became with child. And on the following night I found myself in my own house in Florence again, together with the things I have just laid before your eyes." (Straparola, 1898: 3: 20–1)

For Isabella's story to persuade her husband and family members (the fictive listeners within the tale), they have to believe in an efficacious God. Straparola apparently held that such belief was an acceptable narrative assumption, for he builds Isabella's listeners' acceptance of an interventionist God into the story. Not only is this God said to be capable of transporting Isabella to Flanders and back again, as well as being able to change her appearance in the process, this God can also be expected to wreak vengeance on criminal mischief, such as Ortodosio's kinsmen's laying punitive hands on the pregnant Isabella, as they earlier considered doing. It was their fear of God's punitive powers that restrained them from killing her when they perceived her pregnancy during Ortodosio's long absence. Their desire to preserve family honor by killing her was counterbalanced by their fear that God would exact retribution for their destroying the soul of the child she is carrying, concerns that they repeat in the letter they write to Ortodosio:

> "The child and his brazen-faced mother would have been before now deprived of life by us, had not the reverence which we bear to God stayed our hands on their behalf, for it pleaseth not God that we should stain our hands with our own blood." (Straparola, 1898:3: 15)

An immediate belief in God, in God's knowledge of individual acts, and in God's punishment for transgressions is very real in this tale. In contrast to this apparently real belief in an efficacious God are the purely formulaic invocations to God familiar from medieval storytelling that continue to exist in several of Straparola's tales:

> Now after a time it came to pass (according to the good pleasure of Him who rules the universe and tempers and modifies everything according to His will) that Alchia became with child. . . . (III. 4 [ibid.: 1: 341]).
>
> In due time (by the good pleasure of Him who rules over all), Chiaretta became with child, . . . (IV.3 [ibid.:2: 60]).
>
> "[. . .] even though you be not repaid by those in whose behalf you have wrought, God Himself, the rewarder of all, will assuredly never leave your good deed unrecompensed; nay, on the contrary, He will make you partakers with Him of His divine grace." (V.1 [ibid.:2:139])

In the final magic tale in *The Pleasant Nights*, a mother and her son both invoke God:

> his mother rejoiced greatly, giving thanks to God that He had at last endowed her son with intelligence and good sense, (XI.2, [ibid.: 4: 23])

to which the son replies:

> "Yesterday, my mother, I traded so well that I saved your soul and mine own also; therefore, whenever our souls may take flight from these our mortal bodies, they will go direct to Paradise." (XI.2 [ibid.])

These predominantly formulaic pious expressions give way to a gentle humor in the last instance, but they still alert *The Pleasant Nights* readers to evident tensions between the idea of magic and the concept of God. Other statements in *The Pleasant Nights* make readers aware, as Straparola's readers were aware nearly 500 years ago, of other tensions surrounding magic. Meldina (II.1) soberly cites a wise saying to the pig prince's mother, the queen, namely "that we should believe nothing we may hear, except those things which bear the marks of sense and reason" (ibid.:1: 144–5). For his part, Lamberico the Marquis of Monferrato is "of an unbelieving nature," a man who has to "see for himself" (ibid.:1: 312), and so he requires proof of his wife's claim that jewels fall from Biancabella's hair and flowers from her hands (III.3).

Straparola's tales grew directly from Italy's 200-year-old novella tradition, whose central requirement for plots was the possibility that events could have happened as described, no matter how improbable that might be. Straparola introduced magic into many of his brief narratives, an act that overturned long-established and generally accepted literary rules for verisimilitude in novellas. Straparola clearly recognized his divergence from the western novella tradition in creating plots that slotted magic into brief narratives, because he used not the term *novella* but *favola* for these tales.[10]

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[10] I should like to draw attention here to Marga Cottino-Jones's discussion of Straparola's innovation in "Princesses, Kings, and the Fantastic: A Re-Vision of the Language of Representation in the Renaissance," (2000: 145–6, 173–84), which she terms "fantastic" and which she understands as "propos[ing] alternatives to the real world" (174) and as "focused on creating a middle-class, popular imaginary world inspired by the instinctual and the *fantastic*, rather than by the rational or the logic (sic)" (183).

In a rare instance of depicting magic practices themselves in a brief narrative, he situates magic within two belief systems, Christian and satanic. In other tales he mocks the credulity of the simple, when they encounter fakers of all stripes, including supposed workers of magic. And in his newly composed fairy tales, he introduces a female fairy population that serves an individual's most pressing needs in a one-way flow of supernatural powers, from fairy to human, without requiring anything in return.

Straparola's magic bumped against centuries-old legal restrictions on trafficking with the supernatural that Italy's religious and secular courts had worked out over the centuries. And just as Straparola began composing *The Pleasant Nights,* attempts to control heretical thought and social practice in printed books in Italy as a whole (Monter and Tedeschi, 1986) and in Venice in particular (Grendler, 1977) were beginning to emerge. In his collection, Straparola himself made few distinctions about how far and in what direction an author could go with magic. But that was about to change.

8

The Evolution of Fairy Tale Magic from Straparola to Basile and Perrault

Within the magic in Giovan Francesco Straparola's tales in the *Pleasant Nights*, it is principally satanic black magic as practiced in "Ortodosio and Isabella" (VII.1) and "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (VIII.5) that conflicted with canon law. The sorceress Gabriela in "Ortodosio and Isabella," whose historical namesake was condemned by church authorities and executed 200 years earlier, demonstrates this clearly. But neither church nor state had a position on Straparola's fairy tale magic.

The magic in Straparola's fairy tales is newly this-worldly. His heroes may travel magically to real geographical destinations like Flanders or even further afield to England or Damascus, but they never journey to an island that only they can see, to a religious or mythic locus like Hades, or to an alien realm of reality like that reached by Lanval or Liom/nbruno. In Straparola's *magic* tale "Ortodosio and Isabella," demons are conjured from their parallel world, but in his *fairy* tales supernaturals are not accompanied by hints of or reference to a parallel world. Instead they materialize among human kind in familiar places without reference to another world. In "Peter the Fool" (III.1) the wish-granting tuna swims in the sea where Peter normally fishes and in "The Pig Prince" (II.1) three fairies fly into Queen Ersilia's garden, where she's having an afternoon nap.

Unencumbered by fairyland fiction backstories, Straparola's supernaturals focus solely on the condition of a tale's hero or heroine, whom they purposefully and routinely benefit. Only on rare occasions do their words bring difficulties, as when the third fairy visiting Queen Ersilia wishes that her future son "shall be born in the skin of a pig, with a pig's ways and manners, and in this state he shall be constrained to abide till he shall have three times taken a woman to wife" (Straparola, 1898: 1: 135). Although a fairy-brought difficulty like this may defer the titular hero's

happy ending, it does not prevent it. In this case, the pig prince eventually marries a deserving girl, and conversely, the poor girl he marries ascends to royal estate and to the privileges and comforts that her rise confers.

In the rise fairy tale that eventually became "Puss in Boots," the orphaned and impoverished Costantino marries a princess, gains a castle, lands, and the benefits of ownership, so that in achieving material happiness here on earth he leaves youthful suffering far behind, all through the good offices of an enchanted cat. In a restoration fairy tale with royal protagonists, Prince Livoretto, the son of the King of Tunis, completes tasks and passes demanding tests and magic trials on the way to the happy ending that unites him with Princess Bellisandra and raises him to the Sultan of Egypt's throne (III.2). In another restoration tale, "Tebaldo" (I.4), the widower king,

> having sworn to remarry only a woman whose finger fits his dead wife's ring, fixes on his daughter Doralice. Her old nurse helps her by giving Doralice "a certain liquor which had such great virtue, that whosoever took a spoonful of it, or even less, could live for a long time without further nourishment" (ibid.: 84). Thus Doralice escapes in a trunk that the unwitting father orders sold and removed. Bought by a Genoese merchant, it goes to England, where King Genese buys it and places it in his bedchamber. There Doralice emerges each day, puts his chamber in order, and strews the bedcover with flowers and spices. One day, the King hides in the room to solve the housekeeping mystery, sees the beautiful maiden, falls in love, and with his mother's consent, marries her, and has two children.
>
> Her father, learning of her whereabouts, disguises himself as a merchant, kills the queen's children, and smears the sleeping queen with their blood. Then, dressed as an astrologer, he casts suspicion on Doralice, whom the king sentences to be buried "up to her chin in the earth . . . [so that] the worms should devour her while she still lived" (ibid.: 1: 98). Tebaldo returns to Salerno, where he boasts to Doralice's old nurse about the lingering death he brought about. She promptly saddles up, rides to England, and tells all to King Genese, who assembles a mighty host, attacks Salerno, and captures Tebaldo. Put to the rack, he confesses and is tortured, quartered, and thrown to ravenous dogs, "and King Genese and Doralice his queen lived many years happily together, leaving at their death divers children in their place." (Ibid.: 101)

The only possible magic in "Tebaldo" is a potion that provides long-term nourishment; its happy ending comprises "many years" of domestic

harmony. Its royal heroine Doralice suffers both exile and mortification of the flesh and the spirit before her restoration to the royal position that she then enjoys for the rest of her life.

Straparola's "Tebaldo" rests on centuries of tellings of paternal incest, some thwarted and some carried out, with improbabilities built into the stories, but with little or no magic in them. Straparola's reworking adds nominal magic and an interim punishing sentence for its queen that was borrowed, ultimately, from the medieval Christian Dolopathos tale collection. This potted history of a single tale shows how magic can move into or out of a narrative over time and from place to place, and can change its genre in the process, in this case from exemplary tale to fairy tale.

Straparola positioned both magic tales and fairy tales in a collection where they were far outweighed by novellas. With the Boccaccian definition of novellas raising implausibility to a high art, that genre utterly eschews the existential impossibilities that magic engenders. Straparola's insertion of magic tales into a novella collection thus violated novella requirements and conventions and aroused immediate literary critical objections. Ordinary readers, however, didn't seem to object to magic, and educated Renaissance readers were thoroughly familiar with it. From Latin-language reprints and translations into Italian they knew the ancient world's magic tales of transformations, while contemporaneous *Orlando* romances by Boiardo and Ariosto delighted both educated and simple readers with their magic, as numerous sixteenth-century reprintings and extensions attest. The early sales history of *The Pleasant Nights* also demonstrates that buyers welcomed magic and didn't avoid Straparola's tales because he had inserted magic tales and fairy tales into a novella collection: the first printing of the first volume sold out quickly and was reprinted within months.

The manuscript of Straparola's Volume 1 of *The Pleasant Nights* easily passed the first hurdle in the publication process on 8 March 1550, when the Venetian Senate Council responsible for assessing new books' moral and political acceptability approved it (Pirovano, 2000:1: liii). But considered within a larger frame of reference, the timing of the initial publication was edgy. In 1550 book censorship was at the beginning of a long process that led to its institutionalization, and Straparola's collection just squeaked by. Once the strictures of the *Catalogo* of 1549 against books "containing things against good morals" (Grendler, 1977: 86) were articulated with reference to religiously heretical materials, its wording permitted and encouraged the control, expurgation, and suppression of leisure readings, such as novella collections. Massucio

Salernitano's *Novellae* and Pietro Aretino's *Sette salmi* were censored in 1551; Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiae* were censored from 1553 onward, as were Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* in 1554, and Agnolo Firenzuola's *Novelle* in 1562 (Coseriu, 1987: 68–9). These novella collections all contained sordid episodes, as did Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*, and in its second printing (1555) Straparola's collection was modified, as the scandalously blasphemous "Priest and the Image-Carver's Wife" (VIII.3) was replaced by two clerically inoffensive tales (Pirovano, 2001: 63).

In 1557 Straparola's title page carries for the last time the words *all'instanza dall'autore*, which indicated the author's participation in and fostering of publication. The subsequent disappearance of this metatextual message suggests that Straparola died before, or soon after, the 1557 publication. Despite the legal changes that Straparola's death must have occasioned, no further amendments to his collection were made until 1565, when ecclesiastical and/or secular authorities took offense at eight of the tales (ibid.: 66–7). Although deemed "innocuous" by a twenty-first-century literary critic (Beecher, 2012:1: 78), the tales were anything but innocuous in a period in which public morality and clerical behavior were being closely scrutinized and zealously reformed. In one tale, the election of a new abbess is deadlocked until a visiting prelate bids the three contending nuns demonstrate a talent unique to her (VI.4). The first pisses with amazing accuracy through the eye of a needle, the second farts so adroitly that one of five millet seeds remains where it is as the other four scatter, while the third catches a peach pit between her buttocks and crunches it to dust. Censors removed the pissing feat. In "Polissena and the Priest" (I.5) censors changed an amorous priest into a minor clerk. And so it went with a gluttonous monk (XI.3), a swindling monk (XI.5), a hermaphroditic nun (XII.9), and a novice who spends the night in a barn (XIII.11). For the most part, the 1565 round of excisions deleted humorous depictions of disreputable or misbehaving priests, monks, and nuns.

In contrast to the attention censors paid to indecencies in Straparola's novellas, they paid no attention at all to the impregnation of a ten-year old girl in the fairy tale "Peter the Fool" (III.1). Let us therefore look carefully at the story's details, to lay out clearly the story elements that the 1565 censors found acceptable:

> Living opposite Peter's cottage, a ten-year-old princess sees and laughs at his "silly antics" each day as he returns from his often fruitless fishing. When he hooks a magic tuna that can grant wishes, Peter takes revenge by asking that "Luciana, that saucy minx, the daughter

> of our king, should find herself with child at once" (Straparola, 1898: 1: 247). Time passes, the pregnancy shows, and by now, Luciana is a pregnant "child of eleven." (Ibid.)

There was no stumbling block in "Peter the Fool" for those from whom Andrea Reuenoldo and Giorgio de'Zilij sought approval for publishing this text in 1565, even though a ten-year-old girl becomes pregnant by a malevolent wish and even though that girl is a princess and the mediate impregnator a common fool. To twenty-first-century readers, the tale would appear to need amending on both moral and socio-political grounds, but it remained unchanged even as sexual allusions in other tales were either removed or altered.

By 1580 *The Pleasant Nights* had been put on Parma's *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (Index of Prohibited Books). Pope Sixtus V followed suit in 1590, putting *The Pleasant Nights* on the Papal Index, a decision confirmed by Pope Clement VIII in 1596 and again in 1600. Nonetheless, the *Pleasant Nights* continued to be published in Venice, which closely guarded its independence vis-à-vis Rome's intrusive regulatory efforts, as far as it was practicable to do so. Despite the papal ban Daniel Zanetti republished *The Pleasant Nights* in 1597, but suppressed five stories (Pirovano, 2001: 71). One detailed the devil's marriage to Silvia Ballastro (II.4); a second was the entire story of the election of a new abbess (VI.4); and another was the story of a monk who marries and then abandons a wife (XI.5), perhaps because it mirrored all too closely the many cases of priestly solicitation of women in the confessional brought before the Venetian and Friuli Inquisitions. The fourth and fifth tales to be censored were the story of sons who disobeyed their father's last will and testament (XII.4) and an irreverent jest about a deacon, a rector, a peasant and his wife, that leaves the peasant believing an evil spirit flattened a fruit tart on his wife's behind (XIII.8). Given the sensibilities of the late sixteenth century, it was probably not only irreverence but also reference to an efficacious evil spirit that resulted in the last tale's banning. Other tales also suffered cuts in Daniel Zanetti's 1597 printing: Gabrina's infernal conjuring disappeared (VII.1), a pedantic professor replaced a priest and the bishop of Brescia disappeared (IX.4), as did a sacrilegious last will and testament (X.4) and ecclesiastical references in nine other tales (Pirovano, 2001: 71–2).

When Daniel Zanetti republished *Le Tredici Piacevolissime Notti* (The Thirteen Pleasantest Possible Nights) in 1598, its extended title reassured readers once again that it was expurgated of many errors (*espurgate nuouamente da molti errori*), as indeed it was. Eight more tales were

"eliminated or condensed," in Donato Pirovano's words, and the censors modified the fairytale "Adamantina's Astonishing Doll" (V.2) by shortening its introductory paragraph (Pirovano, 2001: 72), although they left untouched the magical doll that fills her diapers with gold for those she loves and on another occasion bites hard into a king's nether parts. Although the expurgating process continued, it didn't affect Straparola's fairy tales in Alessandro de' Vecchi's 1599 printing.

In Daniel Zanetti's 1601 reprint, censors returned to "Adamantina's Astonishing Doll," changing the interpretation of its enigma, as they also did to the enigma of another fairy tale, "Ancilotto." The two tales' magic content, however, remained untouched. Two other stories that involved magic but weren't fairy tales were expurgated of "errors" of special interest to ecclesiastical authorities. One tells of the beneficence of the grateful dead, when the spirit of a dead man, in gratitude for his burial and the masses said on his behalf, helps the tale's simple hero to a wedding with a princess (XI.2). The other relates to the legally and religiously forbidden necromancy, as Dionigi is apprenticed to master Lattantio. Did Straparola know of, or had he read Alfonso Valdés's *Due dialoghi. L'uno di Mercurio et Caronte, l'altro de Lattantio et di uno archidiaconio*? That "Lattantio" is an archdeacon's dialogic opponent in a book put on the Siena Index in 1548 (Grendler, 1977: 79, 79 n 48, 83). In Straparola's tale, the young hero Dionigi puts his learning of the dark arts to such good use that he eventually outwits the necromancer and marries Princess Violante, a wedding that rescues him from his poverty and makes him rich and happy, as the tale puts it (VIII.4). With these tales now expurgated of error, Daniel Zanetti's son Zanetto Zanetti published Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* two more times (Pirovano, 2001: 74–5). In 1601, Pope Clement VIII reaffirmed the book's unsuitability in the latest *Index Librorum Prohibitorum,* and after the 1604 and 1608 printings, *The Pleasant Nights* was printed no more in Italy until Giuseppe Rua brought out a scholarly edition at the turn of the twentieth century (2 volumes, 1899, 1908).

Straparola did not himself differentiate between magic tales in which pagan or satanic supernaturals work on behalf of a tale's hero or heroine on the one hand and fairy tales with beneficent fairies that appear from nowhere and propel a tale toward a happy ending on the other hand. The Venetian Inquisition, however, provided clear distinctions by banning efficacious spirits, whether they be grateful dead or an evil spirit that a peasant believed had slapped a tart onto his wife's bottom, but by showing hardly any interest in Straparola's fairy tales, except for a single intrusion into Dionigi and Lattantio to erase its forbidden black

magic. Straparola's other fairy tales, with their fairy-mediated magical assistance that ultimately leads to happy endings, remained untouched in Italy as long as the collection continued to be printed there.

Straparola's magic tales and fairy tale magic went to France in 1560, when Jean Louveau translated the first of Straparola's two volumes as *Les facetieuses nuictz du Jean Seigneur François Straparole* (The Facetious Nights of John Lord Francis Straparole; Bottigheimer, 2005: 20). To my knowledge no examination of censorship within the French editions published between 1560 and 1615 has been yet carried out, and so it is currently impossible to identify specific points of conflict between individual tales and French ecclesiastical or secular authorities.

In Spain, *The Pleasant Nights* became *Honesto y agradable Entretenimiento de Damas y Galanes* (Respectable and Pleasant Amusement of Ladies and Gallant Gentlemen), its title claiming a social innocence, the Spanish definition of which emerges from the pattern of expurgations the book experienced there. David González Ramírez (2011) postulates a 1570s first printing of Francisco Truchado's translation into Castilian from an edition that Doris Senn (1993) identifies as the 1565 Italian edition. Although Truchado, and later Juan López de Hoyos, expunged obscene stories and riddles, citing "la diferencia que hay entre la libertad italiana y la nuestra" (González Ramírez, 2011a: 1230), he kept the disreputably behaving monks, nuns, priests, and deacons of the early Italian editions, in contrast to Italian censors' ongoing post-1565 expurgations of ecclesiastics' misdeeds. Contrary to expectations, Truchado freely expanded the book's depictions of magic. In the case of the Italian edition's account of Messer Artilao's briefly describing drawing a circle with charcoal to begin his magic (VI.1), Truchado extended the description to a lengthy paragraph (Senn, 1993: 62). Moreover, he introduced magic into the frametale, so much so that Senn characterizes the Spanish translation as a recipe book for producing magical effects without calling on supernatural spirits or powers (ibid.: 63), a kind of manual for sixteenth-century parlor tricks.

Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti* was published in print centers all over northern Italy from 1551 into the early years of the seventeenth century. In France the book's popular progress began in 1560 and continued equally as long, while in Spain *Honesto y agradable Entretenimiento* was repeatedly published from the late 1570s onward (Senn; González Ramírez 2011b). And yet, *Piacevoli Notti, Facetieuses nuictz,* and *Honesto y agradable Entretenimiento* ceased publication within a few years of each other, and after 1615 most of its stories lay unreprinted for nearly eight decades.

Giambattista Basile's fairy tale magic

Literary historians and folklorists have inventoried and identified Basile's magic according to motif and tale-type indexes (Schenda, 1977:1: 298–301; Penzer, 1979: 2: 305–21; Canepa, 1999; Zipes, 2001: *passim*), and the Basile scholar Nancy Canepa characterizes Basile's magic, i.e. magic in *Cunto de li Cunti* (The Tale of Tales commonly known as *The Pentamerone*) as a whole as "dissociated from any religious system" (2007: 1). In Basile's tales, as in Straparola's, fairies are primarily beneficent, but in an important distinction, Basile's fairies often act in response to a character's demonstrated kindness and virtue. His gold or silver automata (Magnanini, 2008: 30) are tiny, unlike the *Alf Layla wa-Layla*'s gigantic guardian figures, but their ingenious performances similarly amaze their beholders. When Basile's automata are slightly larger, they help the hapless, unlike the threat that large automata pose in the earlier Arabic tales. In Basile's tales, sexual congress is generally absent in fact, but present in metaphor, with pregnancies often instantaneous and usually impersonal. In this respect, Basile's descriptions of sexual encounters differ substantially from the very personal penetrations that invited sixteenth-century censorship in tale collections as a whole and in some of Straparola's tales in particular. Shapeshifting in Basile's tales happens to good and evil alike, whether peasant offspring or royal child, with further transformations of the inanimate often moving a plot forward. The plot of "Peruonto" (I.3), Basile's version of Straparola's "Peter the Fool," demonstrates several of these points:

> The lazy Peruonto, sent to gather wood, comes upon three boys asleep under the blazing sun. He shelters them with tree branches; they awaken and reward him with the enchantment that he may gain whatever he wishes for. He wishes to ride upon, instead of carrying, the wood he's gathered, and as it carries him, it cavorts in front of the king's palace. The sight of it makes the long-melancholy Princess Vastolla laugh. In a pique, Peruonto wishes her pregnant by him, and she eventually delivers twin boys. When they are seven years old, her father the king searches out the boys' father by bringing all the men of the realm before them, whereupon they firmly and decisively attach themselves to Peruonto. The outraged king commits Peruonto, Vastolla, and the boys to a barrel and has it thrown into the sea. However, with his gift of making magic wishes, Peruonto turns the barrel into a fine seagoing vessel, and then into a palace, while he himself becomes handsome.

> Some time later, Princess Vastolla's father, out hunting, is overtaken by darkness. He comes upon a palace, where two little boys inexplicably call him "Grandpa," and where he and his entire court are served richly and plentifully by invisible hands.[1] The next morning Vastolla seeks his pardon; the king is charmed by Peruonto's handsomeness, and carrying them all home to his palace, he commissions grand festivities.

In Straparola's "Peruonto" precursor tale, Pietro angrily impregnates a child of ten, and pragmatically grants life to the magical tuna he hooks, because the tuna promises him "any favour he might demand" and Pietro "fancied he might profit by sparing the fish" (Straparola, 1898:1: 245). In contrast, Basile's Peruonto impregnates a princess of unspecified age, and his altruism toward three sleeping (fairy) boys sets in place an important fairy tale modality, the hero or heroine's intrinsic goodness as precipitator of magically good fortune. (Straparola's Livoretto, as readers of Chapter 7 may remember, was instructed by his magic horse to assist needful animals, rather than doing so as an expression of indwelling compassion.) As such, Basile's Peruonto represents a decided moral refinement of the characteristics that elicit fairy tale magic assistance.

"Peruonto" also incorporates the venerable magic tale trope of transformation, even seeming to allude to animal-to-human transformations: with the hero's "shaggy head, . . . eyes of an owl, . . . nose of a parrot, and . . . mouth of a grouper fish . . ." he resembles animal creatures, and "barefoot and . . . ragged" he is hardly beauteous at first glance or later when his sons recognize him (Basile, 2007: 66). But having wished himself improved, he becomes "as handsome as a fairy" (ibid.). Basile even introduces additional automata into the story from another Italian tale tradition when "tablecloths of Flanders linen" spread themselves and heavily laden plates place themselves on the table, which – when eaten clean of their contents – remove themselves, while invisibly performed lute and tambourine music accompanies the proceedings (ibid.).

Basile's "She-Bear" (I.6) is considerably simpler:

> Queen Nardella, dying, tells her husband the King of Dry Rock to remarry only a woman as beautiful as she. When he chooses his

[1] Note this early instance of a trope made famous by Marie-Jeanne Leprince de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" in the mid-eighteenth century.

daughter Preziosa, she escapes by biting on a stick that turns her into a bear. Taking refuge in a forest, she meets the King of Running Water, who takes her home with him. One day he accidentally sees her with the stick out of her mouth, falls desperately in love with her, remaining so even when she returns to her bear form.

The king's mother engineers the bear's removal and the king loses heart, appetite, and health. Relenting, his mother returns the bear, who now cooks for the king and strews his bed with sweet flowers. When he kisses her, the stick falls from her mouth; he proposes to the beautiful girl before him; she accepts; his mother approves; and wedding bells ring.

Straparola's earlier "Tebaldo" tale of paternal incest and filial escape to a royal marriage is of a different ethical order altogether. Its plot incorporates a father's grisly revenge on his grandchildren, which the daughter's royal husband brutally avenges. In narrative terms, Basile slightly denatures paternal incest by placing greater emphasis on the therianthropic stick that changed Princess Preziosa into and out of the shape of a bear. In so doing, Basile did not so much deal with incest as divert the tale away from it, while substituting a conjure-less transformation-into-a-bear for Straparola's escape-in-a-chest.

Whereas Princess Preziosa's ursine transformation comes from an outside source, a stick, Basile's Zezolla, in the prototypical European "Cinderella" tale, puts her own powers into play, when

she asks her father to greet the dove of the fairies on her behalf and to ask her to send something. "And if you forget, may you be unable to go forward or backward" (Basile, 2007: 85). When the ship on which her father is sailing comes to a halt, the captain explains that a passenger's forgotten promise to his daughter has caused it to stop stock still.

Zezolla murders one stepmother to gain – she hopes – a better one, but is soon disappointed by the large family of girls the second stepmother brings with her. However, the gifts sent to her by the dove of the fairies produce a magic tree that clothes her regally, so that she can attend royal balls, where a prince falls in love with and marries her.

Zezolla's opening speech to her father, with its retributory threat, intimates that she herself possesses indwelling magic abilities. These, together with the deadly directness with which she murders her first

stepmother, suggest a kinship between the Zezolla character and the sorceress Medea as depicted in ancient Greek tragedy and in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Indeed, this apparent quotation from an ancient imaginary is characteristic of the rich and varied content that the classically schooled Basile introduced into his fairy tale repertoire. In this case, Zezolla's murdering her stepmother lay so far outside evolving fairy tale norms that it was excised from its next seventeenth-century realization.

Sexual congress represents a second area of evolution within fairy tale magic. Directly contravening the Catholic Reformation's intentness on raising moral standards from youth onward, Basile embeds sexual congress in *The Tale of Tales,* but disguises it within a system of elaborate metaphors. "Sun, Moon, and Talia" (V.5) shows the process neatly:

> Princess Talia falls apparently dead when a flax splinter pricks her finger. Her father places her on a chair in the palace and departs forever. Some time later a king enters the palace and finds Talia sitting on the canopied chair. Inflamed by her beauty, he carries her to a bed and picks "the fruits of love." Nine months later the still-sleeping princess bears twins, who – in their search for sustenance – suck on her finger and draw out the splinter, so that she awakens. (Basile, 2007: 414)

Now begins a tale of bigamy (the king is already married), jealousy, attempted murder, and intended cannibalism (all by the legitimate wife), capped by a summary execution (of the same wife), forgiveness (for the cook who saves the children's lives), and a wedding (to the formerly sleeping Talia), followed by the heroine's enjoyment of a long life with her husband and children. The tale's magical death-like sleep and its happily-ever-after ending would enter the canon of fairy tale plots when Charles Perrault reworked it in the 1690s, but the salacious parts of the tale survived only in a few witty Perrauldian asides.

To be published in Naples, Basile's tales had to comply with censorship requirements set by its Spanish governors, and those continued the regulations of the 1596 Spanish Index, which remained in force until the mid-1700s (Leathes et al., 1934:1: 607) and whose earlier incarnations had determined what would be censored and what would be permitted to remain in the Spanish translation of Straparola's *Pleasant Nights*. To be sold outside Naples in lands guided by the Roman Index, Basile – or perhaps his sister Adriana who shepherded the tales through publication after his death – scrupulously avoided satanic figures and substituted literary metaphors for narrative sex and sexuality (Canepa, 1999: 217–23; Bottigheimer, 2003).

Basile's tales, like Straparola's, are marked by sudden appearances of marvelous, but not necessarily magic-working, creatures. This aspect brings them close to "the marvelous" itself and thus implicates a different, but closely related, discourse.

Marvels and fairy tale magic

Alongside fairy tales' evolving magic were the prodigious marvels that filled so much cheap print in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Schenda, 1961). Prodigies often consisted of an extraordinary event, such as a precipitation of frogs and fishes that is presented as a true account of something that happened in an actual (but always distant) location. The hearsay aspect of prodigies makes them an early modern form of contemporary urban legends, as does their distant geographical sourcing; distancing in the chapbook or broadside narratives provides the same doubled mediacy, which in the modern world is rendered by introductory phrases such as "One night a friend of my aunt's saw . . ." or "My son's roommate told him that . . ."

Palpable marvels differ from hearsay ones, in that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century viewers could actually see them with their own eyes, as Suzanne Magnanini reports in *Fairy Tale Science: Monstrous Generation in the Tales of Straparola and Basile* (2008: 131–40). Freaks of nature resulting from birth defects were exhibited across Europe. Part of a public discourse about monstrosity, naturally born deformed humans and animals were often exhibited alongside fabricated monsters, such as multi-headed hydras, and both kinds of aberrant creature were illustrated in learned books as well as in chapbooks and broadsides. Literary likenesses of monsters made their way onto the pages of Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* and Basile's *Tale of Tales* (Magnanini, 2008: 123–5, 130–5), where Magnanini understands their appearance as exemplifying Straparola's and Basile's engagement with scientific theory and practice (2008: 163).

Fairy tale magic for the modern world

From medieval romances Straparola chose beneficent magic for two very different readerships among Venetian book-buyers. One consisted of prosperous merchants and the nobly born, two legally distinct groups who sometimes mixed at social or literary gatherings. Both might also be inclined to read Straparola's restoration fairy tales, in which princes and princesses, kings and queens were in title roles, in which adversities

and sufferings comprised narrative action, and in which magically assisted recoverings of royal status provided a tale's happy ending. For an artisanal readership for whom a happy ending here on earth, if not a real possibility, was at least a conceivable narrative outcome, Straparola's rise fairy tale plot was a new and potentially attractive genre, in which poor boys and girls occupied the same positions that royalty did in his restoration fairy tales. Rise fairy tales maintained the same kinds of suffering and adversity with which royalty wrestled, but their poor heroes' and heroines' magically mediated marriage with a prince or princess, king or queen was a heaven-on-earth happy ending that entailed a dramatic social and economic rise from humble beginnings. For their part, wealthy merchants and noble citizens who had been schooled in the classics could have read the tales that expressed hope for poor artisans from the point of view of Aristotelian literary expectations that encouraged laughter at the comic idea of humbly born boys or girls rising to royal status. Whatever the poor and the privileged readerships actually thought, Straparola's rise and restoration fairy tales survived in luxuriously bound sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century volumes in Italian, Spanish, and French.

In the history of fairy tale magic, Straparola's rise and restoration fairy tale plots were the first of their kind, and thus his was a formal contribution. Basile, on the other hand, with his classically schooled and wide-ranging imagination and his keenly observant eye for Neapolitan detail, provided content drawn from the ancient, medieval, and early modern literary worlds to fill the structure that Straparola had created. The particular forms that magic took in Straparola's and Basile's fairy tales, however, were to be further refined before fairy tale magic triumphed in the early modern and modern world.

Fairy tale magic's final transformation evolved in the course of the seventeenth-century Catholic Reformation. The principal aspect of the thoroughgoing social engineering undertaken by the Church involved delineating differences between ignorance and innocence (Bottigheimer, 1994a) and then implementing practices to foster social and sexual innocence. One such practice encouraged becoming like a child, returning to a state of spiritual childhood by contemplating and imitating the Infant Jesus. Labeled *repuerescantia*, the spiritual discipline of an adult's losing one's Self in the contemplation of Jesus's infancy was meant to lead to spiritual, social, and sexual innocence. This argument, put forward by Yvan Loskoutoff in *La Sainte et la Fée* (1987), goes a long way toward accounting for the childlike aspects of fairy tales and fairy tale magic created in 1690s France.

The 1690s produced two kinds of magic narrative. The first to appear in print was Mme d'Aulnoy's *fairyland fiction*, "L'Île de la Félicité" (The Island of Happiness, 1690), with its parallel world into which its fairy queen disappeared with her human beloved, and from which he emerged only to be killed as he performed a good deed. (See Chapter 1 for discussion of fairyland fictions.) The second was Charles Perrault's first *fairy tale*, plot in "Peau d'Asne" (Donkeyskin, 1694), with all of its action in the earthly world (Bottigheimer, 2012: 101–11).

Perrault composed and published "Donkeyskin" in verse, a form he had successfully employed in the past, but that does not obscure the textual fact that "Donkeyskin" amalgamates two prior tales, Straparola's "Tebaldo" (I.4) and Basile's "She-Bear" (II.6; both discussed above). His rewriting nudges the resulting plot toward narrative innocence and reconciliation, by ignoring the lengthy coda of Straparola's "Tebaldo" (vicious paternal revenge) and excising the framing tales from Basile's "She-Bear" and Straparola's "Tebaldo" (Bottigheimer, 2008:182–6). Perrault introduces other changes that demonstrate his sensitivity to reigning social and literary conventions in 1690s Paris, like a princely menagerie and details of its heroine's wardrobe; his concluding redemption of an incestuously motivated father shows his deference to the morally reformist zeal of Mme de Maintenon, Louis XIV's morganatic wife (ibid.: 187) and to the widely influential Catholic Reformation concept of *repuerescantia*.

Perrault adapted many tales from Straparola's *Pleasant Nights* and Basile's *Tale of Tales,* and his rewriting of each bears witness to his Rococo canonization of Straparola's Renaissance vision of magic. Each rewriting also demonstrates Perrault's *de facto* acceptance of church-driven editorial excisions of demonic magic and the equally church-driven redirection of magic tales toward childlike innocence. Above all, Perrault seizes upon Basile's introduction of magic assistance as a reward for goodness and virtue, making it central to his vision of fairy tale magic's deployment. Others who write in the fairy tale and the fairyland fiction genres at the end of the seventeenth century, like Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier, Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, Catherine Bernard, and Charlotte Rose de La Force, make many of the same adaptations, refining and canonizing the magic of Straparola's fairy tales and the content of Basile's fairy tales for future writers. These women, however, do not incorporate into their fairyland fictions the tenet of *repuerescantia* although they do for the most part subscribe to the notion that pre-existing virtue is necessary for a fairy's magical assistance.

1690s fairy tale magic provided the template for fairy tales and fairyland fictions composed for children[2] for nearly three centuries. Exotic variations entered from Antoine Galland's translation of the *Arabian Nights*, especially from a group of tales contributed by a Syrian Christian in 1709 that included "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" (Bottigheimer, 2014). But the expectation that fairies were female and that they selflessly brought good fortune to those who were themselves good would dominate fairy tale magic until the late twentieth century and beyond.

[2] Erotic and exotic fairy tales composed for adults took root at the beginning of the eighteenth century and thrived for decades. But that is another subject altogether.

9
Afterword

For millennia the gods and demons in brief narratives wielded magic mainly in their own interest. Changing that paradigm required a changed vision of the human condition vis-à-vis the world of demons and divinities. It also required a new belief in the importance, desirability, and legitimacy of earthly well-being, rather than postponing well-being until a heavenly afterlife. These changes occurred at a time when the technology of print could confirm and spread them, resulting in the phenomenon of fairy tale magic as it has come down to us.

I am not a specialist historian of most of the eras whose magic tales I have analyzed, nor am I a specialist in the history of magic as it has been studied by adepts and practiced by them over the millennia. If I have made mistakes in correlating tale content with historical conditions, I welcome corrections to and amplifications of my conclusions. On the other hand, I am confident of the validity of my observations and conclusions about individual tales, the tales of an era, and groups of those tales in comparison with one another.

The mood of fairy tale studies is currently contentious, but I hope for dialogue that will refine the results of my efforts to understand the varieties in perceptions of narrative magic, its overall position, and the way in which magic seems to have been understood in relation to human beings, that is, the human protagonists of magic tales, over millennia. Magic that helps the suffering recurs sporadically in this account. Magic that brings about an earthly happiness that is valorized as such constitutes fairy tale magic and is different. The very conception of fairy tale magic emerges gradually at the end of the Middle Ages. Its birth as an enduring tradition is marked by the fairy tales that Straparola inserted into *The Pleasant Nights* in sixteenth-century Italy. The idea of a magically-mediated happy ending has grown steadily in

imaginative power, paradigmatic strength, and literary influence for 500 years.

Two or three medieval tales, widely separated in time and geography, predate the post-1550 early modern and modern model of magic as mediator of a happy ending, but the overall plot of each of these tales is conditioned by the stated centrality of divine power. It is only in Renaissance Italy that a narrative form develops that unites the principal markers of the modern fairy tale: magic that a protagonist can rely on for help, magic whose deliverer has a narrative life only among humans, and not in a separate parallel fairyland realm, Olympic community, or heavenly home. That magic valorizes a happy ending here on earth consisting of the joys of material plenty, marriage, and family.

These markers, along with the establishment of a body of stories embodying these characteristics, separate the modern fairy tale from earlier instances of magically mediated happy endings, such as that in the ancient Egyptian story of the shipwrecked sailor or in that of the medieval Jewish Solomon's daughter in a tower. In the European context, *Liom/nbruno* begins the process that Straparola catalyzes, Basile completes, and Perrault refines.

Fairy tales, with their magically mediated worldly happy endings, have common denominators far different from magic tales. Their characters behave in ways that express expectations that arise from urban life and a background money economy. They seek not a heavenly reward but heaven on earth, and fairy tale magic gives it to them.

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